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ABSTRACT

Barriers faced by 42 nontraditional age women (age 35 or above) enrolled as freshman in four state institutions in Oregon were studied, based on a demographic survey and interviews. The following types of barriers were identified: (1) social barriers, constraints brought about through economics, age, family or community attitudes, or sex-role stereotyping; (2) insitutional barriers, practices that discriminate to keep nontraditional-age women out, or means that are not used to encourage and support their entrance; and (3) psychological barriers, pervasive and complex beliefs concerning personal identity and self-image. General institutional barriers (43%) were identified more often than general psychological barriers (29%) or general social barriers (28%). When asked to identify one or more major barriers that could have kept them out of school, major social barriers (65%) predominated over major institutional barriers (17%) and major psychological barriers (17%). The respondents offered recommendations that could aid other nontraditional age women to enter college. A literature review and questionnaire/interview forms are included. (SW)

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Title: BARRIERS NON-TRADITIONAL AGE FRESHMEN WOMEN ENCOUNTER AS THEY SEEK ENTRANCE TO FOUR-YEAR COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

The barriers non-traditional age women encounter as they work through the decision-making and admissions processes prior to entering four year colleges and universities are identified and discussed in this descriptive study. Forty-two women age 35 or above, enrolled as freshmen students in one state college and three state universities, volunteered as participants. Each subject completed a demographic survey and was interviewed during fall or winter academic terms of 1984-1985.

Barriers identified through interview transcripts were classified into three categories, (a) social barriers, constraints brought about through economics, age, family or community attitudes, sex-role stereotyping; (b) institutional barriers, practices that institutions use that actively or otherwise discriminate to keep non-traditional age women out, or means that are not used to encourage and support their entrance into school; and, (c) psychological barriers, pervasive and complex beliefs concerning personal identity, guilty, and self-image.

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General institutional barriers (43%) were identified more often than general psychological barriers (29%) and general social barriers (28%) as women discussed their decision to return to school, and described their progress through the admissions process. A lack of information about how to approach the institution and a lack of knowledge about how the system worked created most of the institutional barriers women encountered.

When women were asked to identify one or more major barriers, formidable enough to have kept them out of school, major social barriers predominated (65%) over major institutional barriers (17%) and major psychological barriers (17%). Over half the major social barriers identified were financial, and one-third of the major social barriers cited were connected with family responsibilities.

Subjects were asked for recommendations that could aid other non-traditional age women contemplating entering college or university. Over 70% of these recommendations were directed at alleviating or eliminating institutional barriers. Most of the recommendations called upon colleges and universities to recruit non-traditional age students, offering them information about educational opportunity and assistance with admissions. These recommendations as well as data from the study were used as the basis for recommendations for recruitment of non-traditional age women.

BARRIERS NON-TRADITIONAL AGE FRESHMEN WOMEN ENCOUNTER AS THEY SEEK ENTRANCE TO FOUR-YEAR COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

by

WANDA YOUNG CADMAN MOORE

August 1985

DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to the forty-two women who shared their experiences with the hope that the doors they opened, and the doors that were opened for them, will swing wider for others who want to follow in their footsteps.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Background

An increasing number of non-traditional age women are entering post-secondary schools in the United States. Some of the institutional policies and societal expectations that created insurmountable barriers to higher education for older students are beginning to disappear. Non-traditional age women who wish to resume their educations are discovering that colleges and universities are accepting older students. While access to higher education continues to be viewed by many as the prerogative of the young, post-secondary education opportunities are increasing for older women.

Changing societal perceptions of women's role have contributed to the number of non-traditional age women who are joining college-bound high school graduates. In order to achieve this non-traditional goal of college after age 25, women have had to disprove widely held beliefs of female intellectual inferiority, deny the notion that certain feminine characteristics limit women's role to the home, overcome stereotypes that place women subservient to men, and contest the practice of exclusion of women from what were deemed male roles, and male lifestyle.

While there has been some progress in eliminating discrimination against older women attempting to enter post-secondary education at a non-traditional age, institutional, social and psychological constraints

still exist. These constraints continue to raise barriers that limit women's educational participation in post-secondary education. In spite of increased institutional and societal acceptance and a growing population of women 35 and older, the course for non-traditional age women entering colleges and universities is fraught with obstacles.

Focus of the Study

This study seeks to identify the barriers that women, age 35 or above, encounter as they work through the decision-making and access processes prior to entering four-year colleges or universities as freshmen students.

Purposes

There are two purposes for this study. One is to identify barriers non-traditional age women encounter as they attempt to enter a college or university as freshmen students. The second purpose is to present recommendations based on the results of this study that will provide the means to alleviate or eliminate these barriers for others. Barriers will be identified through interviews with forty-two freshmen women, age 35 or above, who are seeking degrees at four Oregon state institutions of higher education.

Interest in selecting this particular subject and gender group for research is two-fold: (a) the number of potential older students, particularly women. The largest group of persons in the United States today is 35-54 years of age (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1984). Projections of population growth by the Bureau and the National Center for

Educational Statistics (NCES, 1982) indicate that this group will increase from 45 million persons in 1960 to 80 million in the year 2000. The population of females in this age group rose sharply over that of men. Women age 35-44 gained by 1,604,000 in the ten years between 1970-1980. National Center for Educational Statistics (1982) projected a gain of 4,000,000 in this age group by 1991. These data contributed to the selection the age group, 35 and above, for this study; (b) the results of a federal study undertaken by the NCES (Kyle, 1979). This study identified three major current and future issues concerning non-traditional students in post-secondary education. One of the major issues singled out for future study was the impact of non-traditional age women students on post-secondary education. Impetus for the NCES study was generated through higher education administrators seeking means of compensating for the decline in the number of traditional age students projected through the late 1990s.

These factors, the increasing population growth of older women, and the national interest in non-traditional age women as post-secondary students, provide inducement to identify barriers that deter or hinder non-traditional age women who seek to enter colleges and universities. A contributing factor, and another incentive for this particular research project, came later through interest expressed by persons responsible for student services in several colleges and universities in Oregon.

The Subjects

Women, age 35 or above, who were enrolled as full-time freshmen students in four state institutions in Oregon, were identified as

potential subjects for this research. Forty-two women volunteered from among the 62 who met the criteria for the study. The selection of freshmen women as subjects for the study was based on their proximity to the decision-making and access processes. Selecting freshmen women seemed the best guarantee of finding subjects who were starting their higher education experience. Their recall of the events and the barriers they encountered as they made their decisions and moved through the admissions processes to the point of beginning course work would be simpler for women not far removed from the experience. The need to identify barriers recently encountered, thereby insuring to a greater degree that recommendations would reflect current problems, was also an important consideration.

The Schools

Four state-supported institutions were selected for this study. The rationale for selection was: (a) Oregon schools of higher education that functioned similarly in the way they recruited students, and in their admissions procedures. Upon investigation, these requirements limited the selection to state schools, which generally operate under standard procedures delineated by the Chancellor's Office and the State Board of Higher Education; and (b) schools that were different in size, degree focus, and educational mission. The four schools in this study include a liberal arts college, an urban university, a land-grant university and a research university.

Definition of Terms

Definitions of the terms used in this study are cited where they are taken from a source.

Barrier. A barrier is defined as "something that restricts or prevents free interchange or movement; a boundary or limit" (Merriam-Webster).

Institutional barriers. Practices that institutions use that actively or otherwise discriminate to keep non-traditional age women out, or means that are not used to encourage or support their entrance and continuance in higher education; social barriers, constraints brought about through economics, status, age, social class, ethnic/racial origin, and family or community attitudes, particularly in the area of societal sex-role stereotyping; and psychological barriers, pervasive and complex beliefs concerning sex-differences, self-image, guilt, personal identity issues, and differences in male and female intelligence and motivation.

General barrier. Used in this study to differentiate from a major barrier. A general barrier is one identified by the subject during the interview discussions of decision-making and institutional access.

Major barrier. One or more barriers identified by the subject in response to a request for barriers formidable enough to have kept the subject out of school.

Non-traditional age. Age 35 or above. The term non-traditional age is used in this study to describe students in four-year post-

secondary schools. (Many studies typically define non-traditional age students as those age 25 or older.)

Non-traditional. Refers to any student or college/university practice/program other than those for the traditional age student. The term is also used in this study to differentiate between a non-traditional age student (age 35 or older) and a non-traditional student, one over age 25.

Overview

Chapter II will consist of an examination of a body of literature in order to investigate questions concerning the historical perspective of non-traditional age women students in higher education; returning women students; and barriers encountered by returning women students who seek access to four-year colleges and universities.

Chapter III will describe the details of the procedure for conducting the study. The results of the study will be reported in Chapter IV and a summary, conclusions and recommendations will be presented in Chapter V.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Three categories in the literature pertaining to women and higher education are relevant to this study of the barriers women 35 and older encounter as they seek entry to four-year colleges and universities. A review of the literature was undertaken in each of the following categories: (a) the historical perspective of non-traditional age women students in higher education; (b) returning women students; (c) barriers encountered by returning women students who seek access to four-year colleges and universities.

Historical Perspective

Information about non-traditional age students and higher education is relatively sparse in the literature before 1972. Research of veterans returning to school, and the effect of the Veteran's Educational Act on higher education was of interest to researchers during the 1950s and 1960s, but there were few studies about older women students. This lack was due in part to the size of the group--infinitesimal when compared to the number of 18-24 year old students in American colleges and universities.

Women returning to school, seeking a degree after an absence of 15 or more years, is a fairly recent phenomenon. Beginning the late 1960s, college and university admission of women 35 and older began to

increase. Tittle and Denker (citing U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1979) found a dramatic change between 1972 and 1976. The number of women 35 and older enrolling in colleges and universities had increased by 67.5%. By 1978 the increase of women in this age group enrolling in post-secondary institutions had increased by 102% over the enrollment figures for 1972. In 1980 enrollment had grown to 981,000, a 123% increase (pp. 10-11). The growth in enrollment of women over 35 is projected to continue based on an increase in age groups over 35. U.S. Bureau of the Census (1984) population projections indicate that the number of persons 35 and older will continue to grow through the first two decades of the 21st Century (pp. 6, 7).

Unfortunately, comparative analyses of national enrollment patterns before 1978 for students 35 and older are not available. Research of non-traditional age students, male and female, is complicated by limitations in census reports and statistical records for higher education prior to 1978. Specific enrollment data in colleges or universities were not collected for a large segment of non-traditional age students before 1972. Early federal and state census reports did not count any student over the age of 34 (Tittle & Denker, 1980, p. 10). After 1972 data for students 35 and older were reported as a whole, while data describing students under 35 were classified in five-year age groups. The National Center for Education Statistics (Kyle, 1979) lacked a basic data-core as late as 1978 for the non-traditional age student, "an on-going data-base from which to discern basic trends and practices" of a changing student population (p. 18).

Prior to the early 1960s much of the literature surveying women and higher education was limited to the history of women's colleges, biographical accounts of educated women, and the female role in higher education. Research between 1960 and 1972 concerning women students in higher education focused primarily on traditional age students and women faculty (Newcomer, 1979; Bernard, 1964), although a few students included discussion of the effect of the growing number of older women students. Degler (1964) and Ginzberg (1966) traced traditional and non-traditional age students in issues of historical significance for women in higher education. Others were concerned with equal opportunity for women faculty and women students in post-secondary education. The effects of sex-role stereotyping and sex discrimination on opportunities for women were examined by Epstein (1970), Janeway (1971), Roby (1972), and others. Implications of civil rights legislation for women and higher education were of particular interest to some groups. The Carnegie Foundation commissioned a number of studies to determine the extent of opportunity and equality for women in higher education (1968, 1970a,b, 1971a,b). These studies resulted in recommendations that were intended to increase equality of access for traditional age students, and equality of participation in higher education for women students and faculty.

Other research in the 1960s and the early 1970s that focused specifically on the issues of women students and faculty in higher education included studies by Anderson, Bowman, and Tinto (1972), and Cross (1971). They examined sociological events affecting women and higher education. One of the findings was the declining numbers of

female high school graduates entering colleges and universities from the early 1950s to the late 1960s. The underrepresentation of women faculty beyond the secondary level, and in specific academic areas, was examined in a number of studies including those of Astin (1969) and Bernard (1964). The lack of opportunity for women in graduate degree programs such as medicine, law, engineering, and science was documented by Rossi (1965) and Epstein (1970). In 1971 Walster, Cleary, and Clifford studied sex-bias and sex-discrimination in higher education as did Sandler and Cross in separate studies in 1972. A specific factor of discrimination in higher education has been documented earlier by Blackwell (1963). This research indicated that some men and women were being denied access to graduate schools based on their age. Few studies examined non-traditional age students, although Meyers (1964) and Doty (1966) studied the demographics of the burgeoning adult education movement. Little was written about older women who were attempting to enter colleges and universities, moving into what had historically been perceived as the territory of the traditional age student.

Increasing interest in the civil rights of women in the late 1960s and the early 1970s resulted in a proliferation of federal and private grants for research. An unexpected common element reported in the studies of women and higher education was the growing number of older women who were joining newly graduated high school students to enroll in colleges and universities. Demographic data published by the American Council on Education (1984-85) indicate that these changes in the age distribution of college students began late in 1960.

Ryan (1979) found that:

> The total United States population over the age of 25 enrolled in degree programs increased from 29.3 percent in 1967 to 48.3 percent in 1972 . . . additionally, an astounding 240 percent increase in part-time student enrollment [mainly adults] is expected through 1985. The largest increase in persons in these two groups is women. (p. 1)

Research in the early 1970s raised a number of concerns about the status of women students in higher education. Three major areas affecting students were identified by Ekstrom (1972) and Westervelt (1975): (a) institutional regulations and practices that discriminated against women students; (b) societal stereotyping of females that deterred them from enrolling in post-secondary study; and (c) institutional barriers that limited women's access to graduate school. Both of these studies reported on traditional and non-traditional age women students.

Some of the research provided data to support allegations that discriminatory policies and practices were in effect in many colleges and universities. Rossi (1970a), Oltman (1971), and the Carnegie Commission (1970a) reported that sex-discrimination was seriously restricting opportunities for women students and faculty in higher education.

As a result of these and other studies, and the growing national agitation for women's rights, additional federal legislation to prohibit discrimination was enacted. Title IX in 1972 (and the Age Discrimination Act of 1975) opened wider the doors that had been closed against older women and other non-traditional students who wanted to return to school. No public institution of higher education could deny entrance on the basis of sex, deny or restrict financial aid because of sex,

marital status, or age; use rules concerning marital status or parental status differently because of the gender of the claimant, or deny access to programs because of the gender of the applicant.

Kyle (1979) through a study for NCES responded to concerns posed by "major post-secondary administrators" (p. iii) about the growing number of non-traditional students. Kyle provided recommendations to resolve those concerns in a report titled Issues in Post Secondary Education: the Impact of Non-Traditional Students. One of the recommendations was that the annual Higher Education General Information Survey (HEGIS) include data from fall enrollment figures on age distribution by sex and ethnic identity. Another recommendation was that HEGIS determine post-secondary enrollment patterns in adult non-credit courses. The recommendations were meant to provide information about "the dimensions of a very major change in higher education which is well underway but very inadequately documented" (p. 26), that of the increasing number of older students in higher education. These data would provide information at the federal, state and institutional levels for trends in student participation, and equality of opportunity in access to higher education.

The growing number of older women enrolling in colleges and universities since the late 1960s can be attributed to at least four major factors: civil rights and equality for women specified under the law, the accepted presence of veterans (non-traditional age students) in post-secondary institutions, changes in societal perception of women's role, and the dramatic increase in the number of women 35 and older. The population of females age 35-44 grew from 11,863,000 in 1970 to

13,467,000 in 1980, a gain of 1,604,000. The National Center for Education Statistics (1982) projects a gain of 4,000,000 women in this age group by 1991.

Another factor contributing to the growing enrollment of older women in higher education is the declining number of persons in the traditional student age group, 18-24. "The population aged 18-24 years, so important to colleges . . . is now [1982] an all-time high 30.4 million. It would decline more than 7 million during the next 15 years because of the aging of the last baby boom generation out of it" (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1984, p. 7). It is projected that after the decrease in the 18-24 age group through the 1990s, the group will rebound and grow to 27.7 million persons by the year 2010, but census statisticians predict the group will never again be as large as the 1982 count (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1984).

The steadily declining number of traditional age students has created interest in the economic potential of the older student cohort. As early as the late 1960s historians, educators, sociologists and others were concerned about the shrinking elementary-school clientele, projecting the loss of students to declining college and university enrollment eight years into the future.

> At a time of inflated costs and troubled budgets, no growth and actual decline constitute a serious threat. Under such circumstances the prospect of a new category of students, not counted in previous projections, makes a college president's heart beat faster. (Hechinger, 1975, pp. 14-18)

There are some apprehensions however:

> Unfortunately . . . some colleges and universities have viewed both part-time and adult students as not "serious" and as peripheral to their institutional goals. This attitude, shared by most private

> and public educational funding sources has helped shape many institutional policies and practices. (Hall, 1980, p. 2).

Daniels (1979) maintains that:

> Faculty do not see the need . . . to accommodate re-entry women. In this regard, these dubious administrators see no parallel to the case of the minority students, where special efforts to redress, at least partially, the former discrimination against them. (p. 19)

Returning Women Students

It is very difficult to characterize or to generalize about non-traditional age women students in higher education. Primarily, difficulties lie in the lack of demographic data before 1972 for this age group. Also, few clear-cut definitions of the terms used to describe older students are available. Furthermore, this group has broad age differences, diverse personal goals, varying educational background and life experiences that make comparisons among sub-groups and members of sub-groups difficult.

Returning students are enrolled in community colleges, four year colleges, or graduate school. A formal admission process or an "open door" policy could have provided access to higher education. Within the category of returning students are part-time, half-time, or full-time students with diverse educational background ranging from those with a college degree to those without high school credentials. Their educational goals could include completing one course for personal growth or earning a Ph.D. They might be married, unmarried, divorced or living with a partner; have children or be childless. Some returning students attend school while employed and some are unemployed. They finance their education with federal support, through assistance from their

family, they support themselves, or manage the cost of their education with a combination of these sources. Age among groups of non-traditional students may span 40 or more years. It appears that the only generalization that can be made about non-traditional age students is that they returned to school after an interruption different in length and character than the traditional age student who enrolled in a post-secondary school while in high school, or very shortly after graduation from school.

Re-entry students, adult students, and continuing education students, are terms most commonly used to identify older-than-average students. The terms are used interchangeably to describe groups of persons, age 25 or older, who have returned to some unstructured or structured educational process sponsored by a post-secondary level institution.

The terms also describe programs for non-traditional age students. While the link between these programs is the older student, policies and goals for programs are visualized quite differently by specialists in the field, outside observers, and the students. These dissimilarities pose problems for the researcher attempting to compare non-traditional age students with those of traditional age, or to draw conclusions about characteristics of non-traditional students.

Adult Education

Adult education is used to distinguish a program of continuing education for adults under the sponsorship of a post-secondary institution. Adult education began, however, and to a degree still focusing

"as a separate activity, set apart from the mainstream of the university . . . the concept of adult education was basically a remedial one" (Scott, 1980, p. 5). Another definition of adult education (Astin, 1976) is ". . . vocational and avocational courses designed specifically for adults and offered through secondary schools and community agencies" (p. 47). Reisman (1980) explains, "adult education was once the step-child of the American university, greatly inferior to the quality of the in-house education provided by many leading corporations for their employees" (p. 113). He maintains that adult education has gained stature among some higher education policy makers, particularly when it became apparent that there would be no vast increase in enrollment. "There was an eager belief that recruiting adults for evening, weekend, or learning-at-a-distance programs would replace the eighteen-to-twenty-year-old cohort" (Ibid., p. 114).

Adult education is also a descriptor of persons who are involved in the programs. Adult education students are generally characterized as those 25 years-of-age or older. Some researchers have chosen to use age 22 as the cut-off point for traditional age students and they include the 23 and 24 year old in the non-traditional-age-student classification. Others have included students 16-24 years of age in the traditional student age classification. These differences need to be taken into account when comparisons of non-traditional age students are made.

Re-entry Education

Re-entry programs serve the needs of students who have left school for a period of time and want to return, according to Fisher-Thompson

(1980). She characterized re-entry students as those who "have had the equivalent of at least one year of college and are, in fact, 're-entering' higher education." She describes the re-entry woman as one "who has interrupted her education after high school for at least a few years and is now seeking to re-enter a college or university for the purpose of completing a degree" (p. 2). In her study of re-entry women she found that for various economic and social reasons many re-entry women attend school part-time.

A study by Lourie and Mayo (1977) identified re-entry students as students out of school two years or more, and 25 years of age and older. They found more re-entry women than men who met their definition of re-entry students and more female part-time students than male part-time students.

A broader interpretation of re-entry students is presented by Tittle and Denker (1980). They state that a re-entry student is one who has re-entered the educational system, more often than not on a part-time basis. Unfortunately, "the part-time re-entry woman may well encounter policies, practices and attitudes that are either dismissive or punitive because of her sex, her age, and her part-time status. Institutions [need to] help the part-time re-entry woman overcome outmoded stereotypes and ease back into the academic environment . . ." (Justice & Amperse, cited in Hall, p. 12).

Continuing Education

Astin (1976) maintains that:

> In the early efforts the term "continuing education" was often used deliberately, in the restricted sense of professional refresher education. It was meant to have clear and specific meaning: that of a return to curricular discipline designed by authoritative faculty to expand skills and to introduce newly discovered knowledge to those with previous experience in higher education at varying levels. (p. 7)

Interest in continuing education in American led Johnstone and Rivera (1962) to undertake a broad study of the population of adults involved in continuing education. They found during the year they surveyed the field (1960) that approximately 25 million adults were active in some sort of learning. About half of them had enrolled part-time in courses and activities and about half of the group were women. The median age of the continuing education adults in the programs Johnstone and Rivera studied was 36.5 years of age.

Continuing Education for Women

The movement toward continuing education for women is described by Rice (1983). "Two decades ago, a group of very creative women educators responded to the problem of discontinuity in women's lives by developing new, highly flexible, non-traditional programs in higher education that came to be institutionalized and known as continuing education for women" (p. 3). Continuing education programs for women "were originally developed to facilitate the reentry into the academic world of women past the traditional age of eighteen" (Astin, 1976, p. 50).

Campbell (1973) describes a typical student at the University of Michigan Center for Continuing Education of Women during the years 1964-65. The program served women who were, on an average, 37 years old, married with 2 or 3 children, living within a commuting distance of the college or university. Their husbands were professionals with above-average incomes. These CE women had some college experience and were likely to have a bachelor's degree. Their primary educational goal was employment. Only 42% of the women were enrolled in an academic program, and 68% of this group were enrolled as part-time students.

A major study of non-traditional age women students was undertaken in 1974. Astin surveyed over a thousand women in 15 continuing education for women (CEW) programs. Astin's characterizations of the women in her study were nearly identical to the women identified by Campbell (1973), at the University of Michigan 10 years earlier. She found that the typical participant in a continuing education program was a thirty-six-year-old woman from a middle-class background. Ninety-four percent of the participants were white, 65% were married to 42-year-old business executives or professionals, median age 42, with an above average income. The typical woman had two or three children of school age. Forty-two percent of the participants were enrolled in academic programs, usually part-time, working toward a specific degree, and 45% of the women had at least a bachelors degree when they entered the program.

Lutter (1982) conducted a study of women who had taken at least one course in continuing education at the University of Minnesota. The average age of the entire sample of women ages 22 to 65, was 48. They were predominately white women with family incomes of about $35,000.

Fifty-one percent of the women had completed a four-year college degree, or a more advanced degree when they entered the program. Most of the women were not degree oriented but were interested in intellectual and personal growth.

Research on non-traditional age women students in higher education has relied heavily on data from CEW programs such as Astin's, Campbell's and Lutter's. These data reflect a specific group of older women students and thus: (a) perpetuate the myth that many older women who run to school have different educational goals than traditional age students; (b) specify that other than a traditional educational system is needed to facilitate non-traditional age students; (c) present problems for researchers of older women students who must rely on data reflecting a stereotype of non-traditional age students.

One group of non-traditional age women students described as continuing education students (but not enrolled in a CEW program) were different from those Campbell, Astin and others have identified.

Maslin (1979) in her study of undergraduate women at Temple University surveyed women students age 26 or older, enrolled full-time in degree or credit programs. Women were randomly selected for the study, 42% of the respondents were black, 57% of the women had a household income below $15,000. Forty-seven percent of the group were between the ages of 30-39, 31% of the group had two children, while 17% had three. Three percent of the women had 3 or more years of college experience before enrolling at Temple University. Ninety-one percent of the women were enrolled in a bachelor's degree program.

Astin's (1976) perspective of continuing education for women was that of women who wanted access to colleges and universities "but . . . without conformity to structures and timing meant for young, unmarried, unemployed students" (p. 6). One of the Carnegie Commission's (1973) recommendations in their report on opportunities in higher education for women supported Astin's perspective. They presented the view that there were "special needs of mature married women for continuing education," and advocated "the development of external degree and other non-traditional study programs, emphasizing the need . . . for high quality in such programs" (p. 158).

This stereotype of the needs of non-traditional age women students did not support the enlightened philosophy of those who advocated equal educational opportunity for older women seeking to enter four-year institutions as full-time students. The image of older women who sought admission to higher education prevailed. They were characterized as part-time students unwilling or unable to attend school full-time, underqualified because of a prolonged absence from the classroom, and out of synchronization with the traditional lockstep that passage through the educational process mandated. For these reasons and others, non-traditional age women were not readily accepted in higher education as potential degree candidates.

Barriers to Higher Education

A barrier is defined as something that restricts or prevents free inter-change or movement, a boundary or limit (Merriam-Webster).

Many barriers are encountered by non-traditional age women who seek access to higher education. This review of the literature indicates that they range from the cost of tuition, to age discrimination; from societal sex-role stereotyping of older women, to restrictive institutional policies.

Cass (1975) explains prevailing beliefs about education that have created obstacles for older students.

> For all their abiding faith in education, Americans have long conceived of it as something that happens in schools during a prescribed number of years. It constitutes the "rites of passage" from childhood to adult status, and once completed it is finished--and the individual has been educated. (p. 14)

Education is viewed by many as one part of a segmented life pattern, a segment that is limited to only a certain time of life. O'Toole (1974) explains why older women students might experience resistance as they move through the decision-making and access processes to enter school, and while they are students. "American society supports the notion that education is the privilege and obligation of youth; that work and family management are the responsibilities of adulthood; and that retirement and leisure are events withheld for the aged" (cited in Marienau, 1977, p. 3). Women who are not of traditional age encounter barriers as they attempt to challenge the established rites of passage. Barriers can result from institutional policies and attitudes, social constraints, or as a result of student self-image. Many barriers result from an outdated premise that education is the prerogative of the young.

Analysis of the studies of older women who seek access to colleges and universities reveals a pattern of recurring barriers. Many older women identify the lack of financial aid as a major barrier to their

return to school, others are unable to enter school because child-care is not available. Some who have made the attempt to return are deficient in educational standards set by the school, and some believe they cannot succeed because of the effect of time out of school on their learning ability.

It is difficult to generalize about barriers that are identified in the research. Many studies group traditional age women with non-traditional age women or part-time students with full-time students. Undergraduate students may be included along with graduate students, and students enrolled in personal interest courses are included with those seeking degrees.

Barriers cited in many of the studies relied on data gathered from large, diverse groups. Comparing barriers encountered by women in these groups, with barriers encountered by a sub-group of women age 35 or older seeking access to higher education as undergraduates for example, present difficulties. There are, however, some comparisons that will be made in this study.

Classification of Barriers

How a barrier is classified in the literature on women students and higher education differs according to the researcher's interpretation. Eight types of barriers emerge from the research: institutional, structural, situational, social, psychological, internalized, personal, and socialization.

It becomes apparent as barriers are identified and categorized in the literature that the categories overlap. For example, sex-role

stereotyping is classified as a socialization barrier by Gappa and Uehling (1979) while Westervelt (1975) classifies it as an institutional barrier, and Tittle and Denker (1980) consider sex-role stereotyping a psychological barrier. In her study of continuing education women Astin (1976) classifies sex-role stereotyping as a personal barrier, while sex-role stereotyping is characterized by Roby (1972) in her work as an internalized barrier.

This example of overlapping barrier categories in the literature on non-traditional age women and higher education is confusing and demonstrates the need to combine categories where obvious overlaps occur. Integration of categories allows for a more concise classification of barriers. Westervelt (1975) developed three categories of barriers in her Study of Barriers to Women's Participation in Postsecondary Education. They are: (a) institutional barriers, (b) social constraints, (c) psychological factors. The following categories are a result of using similar categories to those Westervelt developed, with definitions compiled from the literature.

Institutional barriers, those practices that institutions use that actively or otherwise discriminate to keep non-traditional age women out, or means that are not used to encourage or support their entrance and continuance in higher education; social barriers, constraints brought about through economics, status, age, social class, ethnic/-racial origin, and family or community attitudes, particularly in the area of societal sex-role stereotyping; and psychological barriers, pervasive and complex beliefs concerning sex-differences, self-image,

guilt, personal identity issues, and differences in male and female intelligence and motivation.

In their study of returning women Tittle and Denker (1980) found that many of the studies of older women students in higher education indicated that psychological barriers were the most common and the most complex. They were more complex than sociological barriers or institutional barriers because of the diverse individual differences in women.

Institutional barriers are most common, but readily accessible to modification, according to Westervelt (1975). She maintains that changes in institutional practices will in time reduce psychological and social barriers.

Marienau (1977) found the presence of two or more barriers to participation in degree programs in her research. She studied women and men age 20-to-their-late-50s. Most of her sample had completed nearly two years of previous experience in post-secondary education. She generalized from her research that barriers are derived from the situations people face and the value orientations people hold; value related barriers require personal readjustments by the adult learner; and situational barriers have the potential to be overcome by external sources" (pp. 11, 12).

Much of the current interest in studying non-traditional age women students, and those who wish to become students, is the result of the phenominal growth in the number of older women seeking access to colleges and universities. Equally important, and closely related to the interest in non-traditional age students, is the corresponding decline in the number of traditional age students. The effect older students

have on post-secondary institutions, federal and state education policies, and their traditional age cohorts is under scrutiny.

This review of the literature has concentrated on studies of returning women students. The primary objective of this research has been to discover barriers older women encountered as their desire to return to school turned into action, and they sought admission to school.

In Chapter III procedures that were used to study a group of 42 older women and the barriers they encountered as they sought entrance to college or university, will be examined.

CHAPTER III

PROCEDURES

The primary purpose of this study is to identify barriers non-traditional age women encountered as they worked through the decision-making and access processes in order to enter a four-year college or university as freshmen students. Data were gathered for this research through interviews and a survey of demographic characteristics of 42 women at three state universities and one state college.

Participants

Women, 35 years of age and older, enrolled as freshmen in four Oregon four-year college and university programs and registered for nine or more credit hours, were identified as the subjects for this research.

Names and address of students who met the criteria as potential subjects for this study were requested from the registrars of the four schools. Contacting students to request their participation in this research study required compliance with the human subjects research policy at each of the schools. The subjects who volunteered for this study signed a "Consent Agreement to Participate" form (see Appendix A).

Letters explaining the study and requesting participation were sent to each of the potential subjects at the four schools (see Appendix B). Follow-up letters of encouragement to participate in the study were sent to non-respondents to the first request at three schools. The process

used to contact students at one university was more complex and took longer to initiate. Follow-up letters to non-respondents at that university were not sent because of time constraints in the research schedule.

Sixty-two students who were found to meet the criteria for the study were identified by the registrars at the four schools. Of that group 42 students agreed to participate in the study. Two students declined to participate, 18 students did not reply, 3 students had moved or dropped out of school, and 4 of the students did not meet the criteria for subjects. Forty-two students, 67.7% of the identified group of 62, were interviewed. Nine of the 13 subjects identified at Institution A were interviewed, 7 of the 11 students at Institution B, 12 of the 15 students at Institution C, and 14 of the 30 students identified at Institution D were interviewed.

The Interview

Each of the subjects was interviewed at her home campus in space provided by the school. Prior to the interview the purpose and nature of the study were explained to the participant. Details of the method used to select and identify subjects were explained, as well as an assurance of anonymity for the subject. The interview format was in four parts with two open-ended discussion questions, and two questions that required specific answers. Each subject was asked to (a) discuss the decision-making process and significant events that resulted in her decision to return to school; (b) discuss the application and admission processes she worked through prior to beginning classes; (c) identify

any major problems or barriers encountered that could have been formidable enough to prevent her entering school; (c) suggest recommendations to alleviate or eliminate problems or barriers for non-traditional age women contemplating entering a four-year college or university (see Appendix D).

With the subject's permission the interview was recorded. Transcripts were made for each of the interviews.

The Questionnaire

Demographic characteristics of each subject were gathered through the Personal Background questionnaire administered during the meeting prior to her interview.

Items from a questionnaire used by Maslin (1979) were adapted for use in this study (see Appendix C). The questionnaire consisted of 29 questions in four major categories. Section 1, "Personal Background Information," included questions about the subject's age, marital status, annual income, and racial or ethnic background; Section II, "Educational Characteristics," sought information about educational level and educational background of the subject, husband or partner, and parents; Section III, "Family Attitudes," investigated support of the subject in her decision to return to school; Section IV, "Work History," questioned work experience prior to the subject's return to school.

Analyses of the Data

Psychological, social, and institutional barriers encountered by the subjects were identified from the interview transcripts.

Categorical distribution of barriers is shown for each institution, and the institutions as a whole, in Table 1. Barriers delineated for each of the three categories, psychological, institutional and social, are shown in Table 2.

Major barriers, those barriers formidable enough to have jeopardized access to school, were identified by the subjects. They were categorized as social, psychological or institutional, by institution, and for the institutions as a whole. Major barriers are detailed in Tables 3 and 4.

Demographic characteristics of interest in this study are shown in Figure 1, Subjects by Age; Figure 2, Family Income Level; and Figure 3, Number of Children by Family Income Level.

Two of the items on the questionnaire were found to be ambiguously stated, therefore, responses from questionnaire items 8 and 9 were not included in the analyses of the data.

The results of the demographic questionnaire and the interviews will be discussed in Chapter IV.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Demographic Characteristics

The demographic characteristics of women who volunteered for this study were gathered from the Personal Background Questionnaire. This questionnaire was adapted from a section of the survey instrument used in Maslin's (1979) study of "Older Graduate Women at an Urban University: A Typology of Motives, Ego Development, Sex-typedness and Attitudes Toward Women's Role" (see Appendix C).

The demographic characteristics of 42 women age 35 and older, college and university freshmen who were the subjects for this research, are described in the first section of this chapter.

Demographic Data: The Institutions as a Whole

Enrollment data for the four schools in this study were obtained from the Office of the Chancellor, Oregon State System of Higher Education.

Enrollment in fall term 1984 for undergraduate students at the four schools surveyed in this study totaled 35,517. There were 9,688 freshmen students at the four institutions. Average age of all the undergraduates at the four institutions were 23 years.

Sixty-two students met the criteria for this study: women, age 35 or older, enrolled for 9 or more credit hours, and classified as freshmen students. This group of women accounted for .18% of the total schools' undergraduate enrollment, and .65% of all freshmen students.

Subjects

Forty-two of the women who met the criteria and volunteered to be subjects of study completed the Personal Background Questionnaire and were interviewed at their home campus.

The women ranged in age from 35 to 50. The average age was 39.7, the median age 40, and the mode 37 (14%). Eighty-five and one-half percent of the women in this study were between 35 and 43 years of age (see Figure 1).

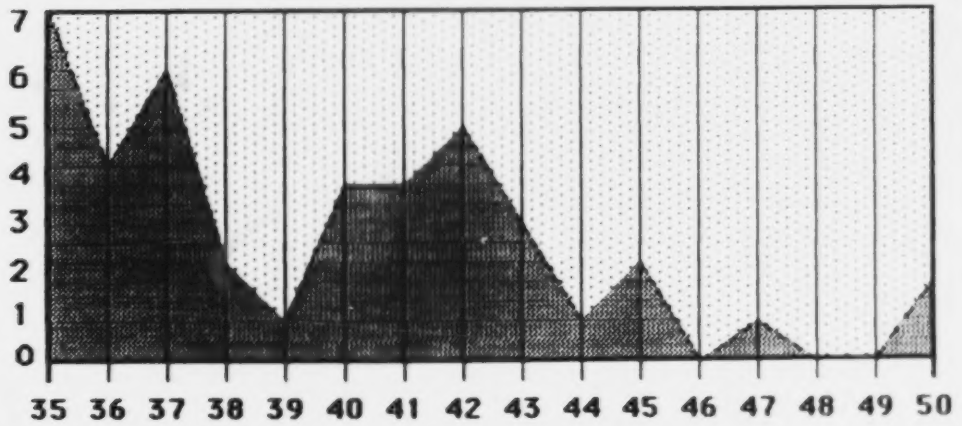

FIGURE 1. Subjects by Age

Racial/Ethnic Background

When asked on the questionnaire to give their racial/ethnic background 39 (93%) of the women in this study reported that they were white, 1 said she was black, and 1 checked the response "other." One woman said her ethnic background was Indian and Hispanic, and another woman reported that her ethnic heritage included one-fourth Indian ancestry.

Family Income

Forty women in the study reported family incomes. Two women did not know their family income. Family income ranged from $5,000 to above $35,000 per year. Seventeen women, 42% of the group, reported incomes between $5,000 and $10,000. The second largest group, 9 women or 22.5% of the group, had family incomes above $35,000.

Seven women, or 18% of the group, reported incomes of $10,001 to $15,000 per year. Income levels between $30,001 and $35,000 were reported by three of the women. Thirty percent of the 40 women reported family income levels of $30,000 or more (see Figure 2).

Fifty-two percent of the women in this study received some form of state and federal school financial aid and/or education loans. It is not known from the responses on the questionnaire if any of these monies were reported as part of the family income. Since the federal government does not require taxpayers to report educational aid or loans as income it is assumed the family income level does not reflect this aid. Income earned through the College Work-Study Program is taxable income.

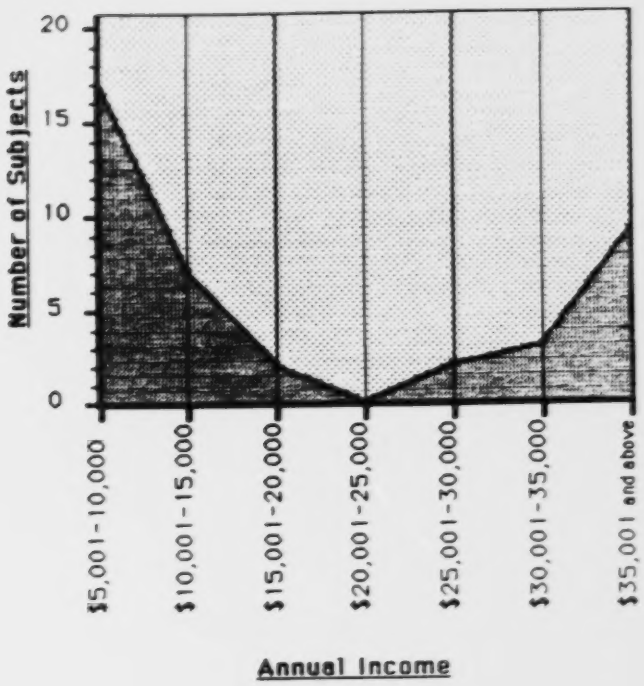

FIGURE 2. Family Income Level

It is assumed that women who were working in this federal program did include it in reporting their family income level on the questionnaire.

Marital Status

Women who were married made up the largest single group (45%) in this sample of 42 subjects, with second or subsequent marriages reported by 24% of these women. Thirty-six percent of the women reported that they were divorced or separated from their husbands, 7% of the women were widowed, 5% had not married. Five percent of the women and their

children were living with a male partner, and 1 woman lived with a male partner and his children.

Motherhood

Most of the women (86%) in this group of non-traditional age students had children. There were a total of 99 children in the families of women in this study. The average number of children per family with children was 2.75. Families with 3 or fewer children were in the majority, 19% of the families had 3 children, 26% had 2 children, and 17% had 1 child. Six families (14%) had 4 children, 6% of the families had 5, and 6% of the families had 6 children. Of the 42 women surveyed, 14% reported that they had no children.

Five mothers said their youngest child was under 6 years of age. Ten of the youngest children were between 6 and 11 years of age. Seventeen children between the ages of 12 and 17 were the youngest children in their families. Four women reported their youngest child to be over 18 years of age. Over one-third of this group of women had children under the age of 12.

There were 13 single parents, women who were divorced, unmarried, or separated and living alone, who had family incomes of $15,000 or less. Forty-three of the children, 44% of the children in this sample, were in single-parent families with family incomes of $15,000 or less. Eight of the two-parent families, with 21% of the children (20 children), reported family incomes of $15,000 or less (see Figure 3).

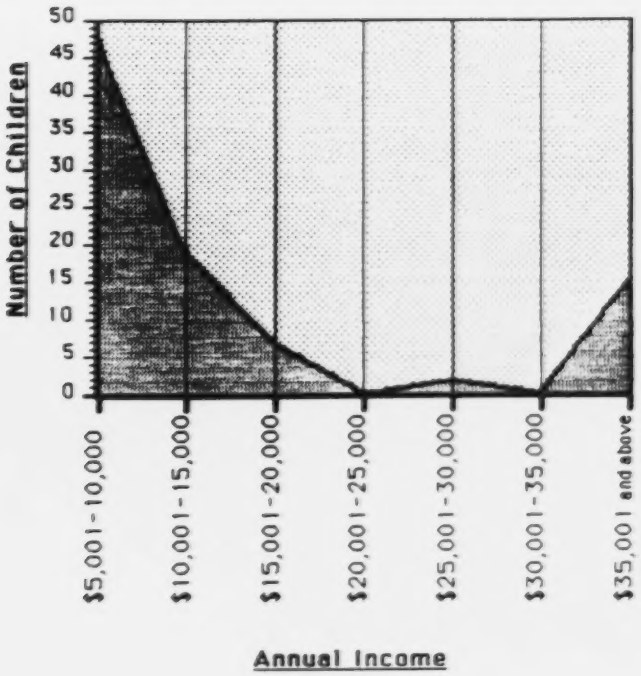

FIGURE 3. Number of Children by Family Income Level

Educational Level

Subjects

All of the women in this study had graduated from high school or earned a General Equivalency Diploma. Some of the women had college-level educational experience prior to entering the school in which they were enrolled. Forty-five percent of the women reported a year or less of college-level work and 24% of the women had two or more years of college level work. Three women (7%) reported more than three years of college-level work, however, all of the women were classified as freshmen students by their college or university.

Husband or Partner

The amount of educational experience was considerably more for the husband or partner when compared to that of the 34 women who answered this question. Six percent of the men had less than a high school education, 12% had a high school or GED diploma. Those with education beyond the high school level included 9% of the husbands or partners with an Associate Degree, 32% of the husbands or partners had a bachelors degree, while 29% reported a graduate or professional degree. Eight of the respondents checked the item "does not apply to me."

Parents

Mothers of the women in this sample of non-traditional age women had more formal education than did the fathers. A few of the parents had college or university degrees, 12% of the mothers and 14% of the fathers. More mothers than fathers had high school, or post-high school experience including some special training or college-level work. The subjects reported that 64% of their mothers had a high school diploma plus additional education, compared to 50% of their fathers, while 21% of their mothers had less than a twelfth grade education compared to 36% of their fathers.

Choice of the Institution

The location of the institution was the reason 36 (86%) of the women in this group gave for entering the school they were attending. Some women gave more than one reason for their choice. Seventeen

percent of the women indicated that the cost of schooling was the reason they selected their school; 29% of the women gave the reputation of the academic major as their reason for selecting the school and 14% of the women selected the school on the basis of academic reputation. Twenty-four percent of the women chose the school on the recommendation of family or friends, and 5% of the women said the cultural environment of the institution as a reason for their choice. One woman chose an institution at the urging of her daughter who was a graduate student at the school and wanted to share an apartment with her mother.

Academic Major

The academic majors selected by 24% of the women in this study were in arts and communication, 19% of the women chose social science, 19% education, and 14% of the women selected the humanities. Business majors were selected by 10% of the women, and 5% were interested in earning a degree in the health/science field. Two women had a dual major, one in physical science and mathematics, another in social welfare and justice. A degree in horticulture was the goal for one student, while two women had not made a decision about their academic major.

Degree Plans

The majority of women in this study (69%) were seeking a bachelor's degree, 29 of the 42 women answering the question checked that response. Twenty-four percent of the women indicated that they will seek a master's degree upon completion of the bachelor's, and 5% of the women said

their goal is a doctorate or a professional degree. One woman indicated that she was "undecided" about which degree she would choose, but she intended to earn a degree.

Career Goal

The career plans identified by the women in this study include 20 different job interests including the fields of architecture and physical fitness. The largest percentage of women (33%), selected secondary or post-secondary teaching as their career goal. The next choice was business with 19% selecting that career. Six women were undecided about a career.

Family Attitudes

The women in this study described the attitudes of husband or partner, children and other family members toward their decision to return to school. There were three attitudinal items on the questionnaire. First, the subject was asked about her husband's or partner's general attitude toward her decision to return to school.

Attitude--Husband or Partner

Fifty-seven percent of the women responding to this question said their husband or partner was "strongly approving" of their decision to return to school, while 18% said their husband or partner was "somewhat approving and encouraging." One woman checked the item "strongly disapproves." Fourteen women did not respond to this question.

Women were then asked to respond to a list of 22 attitudinal descriptors to identify the attitudes of husband or partner (see Appendix C).

Attitude--Descriptors

This list contained 6 positive descriptors, 1 positive/negative descriptor, and 15 negative descriptors. A last choice on the list was "other," to be filled in if another descriptor was needed by the respondent. Many of the 26 women who responded to this section of the questionnaire selected more than one response. Eleven women checked only positive responses. Some women checked both positive and negative responses, while 2 women checked only negative responses. Some of the women wrote a response under the option "other" describing positive or negative attitudes not included in items on the questionnaire. Some comments were: "he has no complaints"; "there is some conflict because of time required for school"; "he encourages me in everything"; "he thinks I will become bored and quit"; "resentful of all the extra work he must do." Sixteen of the subjects checked the item "does not apply to me."

A majority of the 133 responses were positive. women checked 87 positive responses, 65% of all the responses selected by the subjects. Among the positive attitudes of husband or partner were "is helpful in practical matter," "is emotionally supportive," "proud" (of me), and "understands my needs." Three women selected the positive/negative response "approves of my goal, but not the process."

A negative descriptor of husband or partner "feels neglected," was checked by 27% of the women responding. Nineteen percent of the women reported that their husbands or partners were not sure about how they felt about the decision to return to school, and their attitudes about the decision were "changeable." One of the women checked only negative attitudes describing her partner's attitude, including "resentful," "interfering," "ridicules efforts," "is suspicious, apprehensive," and "feels threatened/insecure."

Attitude--Children and Family

All of the 42 women in the study responded to this last question about family attitudes and 64% said that their children or close family members were "strongly approving and supportive" of their decision to return to school. Families that were "Somewhat encouraging and supportive" were listed by 21% of the women. Five percent of the women said their families were "somewhat disapproving and discouraging," while one woman reported that her family was strongly disapproving of her decision to return to school.

Work History

All of the women in this study had worked outside the home. Forty-five percent of the women had worked outside the home prior to their marriages, and part-time after their marriages, 33% had worked prior to their marriages and full-time after. One woman reported that she had not worked outside her home until she was divorced.

Fourteen percent of the women in this group had worked for 20 or more years. The largest percent of women had worked from 11-15 years, 48% of the women checked this response. Thirty-six percent of the women had worked outside the home for 3-10 years. Some women reported that a portion of this work was part-time. These respondents compiled this work time and reported it on a full-year basis.

Occupations

Most of the 42 subjects reported that they had worked at more than one type of job during the years that they worked outside the home. Use of the term "outside the home" work did not exclude listing work for pay inside the home such as baby sitting, sewing, and preparing food for sale, however the wife who worked with her husband on their dairy farm reported working one year outside the home. Eighty-two responses were checked on the work history list of 9 occupational categories. Many of the women reported that they had worked in offices at secretarial, clerical, and general office work. Twenty-eight women (66%) had worked at jobs like these at some time in their working lives. The next most common occupations were retail sales (24%) and waitress or food service (19%). Twenty-four percent of the workers reported that they had worked as supervisors or managers, while 12% reported that at least one of the jobs they held was "professional."

Summary--Demographic Characteristics

The demographic profile of non-traditional age freshmen students in this study indicates that 93% of the women are white, most of them are

between the ages of 35-37 (40.5%), and 40-44 (38%). Family income is very low for 40% of the women in this study who have family income levels at, or below, $10,000 per year. These income levels can be compared with those that are at poverty level in the United States. To be considered poverty level, based on federal guidelines, annual income cannot exceed: $4,980 for a single person, $6,720 for two, $8,46 for a family of three, $10,200 for four persons, $11,940 for five, $13,680 for six, $15,420 for seven, $17,160 for eight persons (Oregon Department of Health and Human Services Publication, 1984).

Fifty-two percent of the women in this study received some form of federal or state educational aid designed to bridge the gap between contributions of the study and family and the full cost of their education. This assistance took the form of federal and state education grants and loans.

Most of the women were or had been married with 45% reporting that they were now married, and 36% reporting that they were divorced or separated. Eighty-six percent of the women in the study were mothers, and there were 99 children in this group. Seven families had 1 child, and 11 of the families had 2 children. There were 3 children in 8 of the families, and 4 children in 6 of the families. Two mothers had 5 children, and 1 had 6 children. Six women reported that they had no children. Four mothers said their youngest child was over 18, while 5 mothers had children under 6 years of age. The average number of children per family was 2.75.

The reason most women said they had chosen the institution they were attending was because it was close to where they lived. All of the women in this group of returning students were seeking a degree, and all but two had decided on an academic major. Of the 42 women in the study, 6 had not yet decided on a career goal.

The educational level of the husbands and partners in this group of women was high compared to their wives or partners, with 62% of the husbands or partners with bachelor's or graduate degrees. Five women who were, or had been married, chosen not to answer this question.

At least half of the parents of the women had high school diplomas, or high school diplomas plus special training, or some college work--64% of the parents were in this educational level classification. Twenty-one percent of the mothers had less than a high school education compared to 36% of the fathers.

The work history of this group was high compared to the national average of three-women-out-of-five working outside the home. Nearly half of the group, 48%, had worked between 11-15 years, 14% had worked more than 20 years, and 36% had worked for 3-10 years outside of the home.

Nearly all the women had worked in at least 3 of the 9 occupation categories listed in the questionnaire. They were employed as domestics, in clerical, secretarial and general office work, or in retail sales. Most of the women had held jobs requiring very little training. Over 75% of the jobs they reported working at were in non-skilled areas, and over half of the women reported working at more than one such job.

The attitudes of the husbands and partners and the families of these non-traditional age women who had decided to return to school were generally positive. Most of the women indicated that there was a great deal of support for their decision. Two women, each living with a partner, and one married woman indicated on the questionnaire that attitudes of partners and husband were negative. One woman reported that her husband's attitudes were positive but her parents were very negative about her decision. Three mothers said their older children had negative reactions to their decision to return to school.

The next section of this chapter reports on the results of the interviews of the 42 women who were subjects of this study.

The Interviews

Interviews were conducted in order to identify barriers non-traditional age women encountered as they made the decision to enter a college or university, and as they worked through the admissions process. Forty-two college and university freshmen women, age 35 or older, who volunteered as subjects for this study were interviewed at their home campuses.

The purpose of the study was explained to the subjects. The interview process was described and permission to record the session was obtained from each of the students. Length of the interviews averaged 45 minutes.

The interview guide was divided into four sections. In Parts 1 and 2 the subject discussed her experience as she made her decision to return to school, worked through the admissions process, and was

accepted as a student. Part 3 required specific responses concerning major barriers; those barriers formidable enough to have kept the subject from entering school. In Part 4 the subject was asked for recommendations that might assist in alleviating or eliminating barriers for other non-traditional age women contemplating returning to school.

Barriers

For the purpose of this study a barrier is defined as something that restricts or prevents free interchange of movement; a boundary or limit (Merriam-Webster).

Classification

A list of the barriers that were identified by the subjects in Parts 1 and 2 of the interviews were classified as institutional, social, or psychological. Classification in some cases was difficult. Determining whether a barrier is social or psychological for example, can pose problems. In such cases classification will depend on the subject's perception of causation. For example many females 35 and older were taught, at home and in school to be non-aggressive and non-competitive. These are social barriers that may deter women from seeking higher education. Other women with the same social influence may be aggressive and competitive but feel guilt because of their non-conformity, creating a psychological barrier that may inhibit the desire to continue their education.

Another problem in classifying a barrier is accepting only one ingredient when there may be more. Age is defined as a social barrier

in the literature (Westervelt, 1975; Maslin, 1978; Davis, 1982). Age however, is an institutional barrier if certain specialized institutions deny or restrict entrance based on the age of an applicant, and, some women may need to overcome a psychological barrier with the belief that their age precludes entering an institution catering to the young.

Institutional, Social, Psychological Barriers

Barriers were identified from the transcripts of the 42 interviews. The tables of barrier distribution by category in this chapter reflect barrier responses rather than specific barriers. While 31 of the responses drawn from interview transcripts at Institution C identified social barriers, they did not identify 31 different social barriers. Some of the barriers were recurring--a barrier identified by more than one subject. It was possible therefore, to tally 10 responses for the same barrier.

Parts 1 and 2 of the interviews resulted in 99 barrier responses from the 9 subjects at Institution A, 57 responses from the 7 subjects at Institution B, 124 responses from the 12 subjects at Institution C,

TABLE 1. Percent of Barriers by Category and Institution
(N = 413 responses; 42 subjects)

	Institution				
Barriers	A	B	C	D	All
Institutional	37	47	48	40	43
Psychological	28	33	27	27	29
Social	34	19	25	33	28

TABLE 2. Analysis of Table 1 by Category

This table lists the barriers for all institutions; percent of Barriers Identified by Subjects: Institutional Barriers, Social Barriers, and Psychological Barriers.

Barriers	Institutions All
Institutional Barriers	
Recruitment	23%
- no initial contact from institution	
- no pre-enrollment information	
- little or no pre-enrollment assistance	
- lack of knowledge about opinions in higher education for non-traditional age students	
Admissions policies/procedure	16%
- ignorance of admissions process	
- ignorance of availability of financial aid	
- lack of organization in admissions process	
- poor/negative staff attitudes	
Advising/counseling	14%
- little or no contact with staff	
- faculty not available	
- incomplete/faulty information	
- negative attitude toward non-traditional age students	
Registration process	10%
- unaware of procedure	
- lack of assistance	
- incomplete/faulty information	
- disorganized	
Non-traditional age	9%
- inappropriate course requirements	
- condescending/negative treatment, school staff and traditional age students	
Social Barriers	
Family attitudes	36%
- negative attitudes-husband	
- negative attitudes-children	
- parents question need/outcome of education	
- children/husband or partner resentful of loss of family income	

TABLE 2. continued

Barriers	Institutions All
Financial	31%
- dependent on financial aid	
- need to sell home to finance education	
- need to assist other family members in school	
- responsibility to provide part of the family's income	
Sex-role stereotyping	10%
- school cannot interface with role of wife/mother	
- mistaken for parent rather than student	
- older women's role seen as homemaker, not student	
Age	9%
- everyone at school is young	
- age viewed as a negative factor by institution, family, or peers	
- job availability for older students	
Chld care	6%
- quality care for children	
- full responsibility for children, single parent	
- expense of child care	
Other	6%
Psychological Barriers	
Personal identity	36%
- high school record poor, fear of failing	
- doubt school as an option for non-traditional students	
- ability to work and attend school	
- ability to maintain dual family role/responsibilities	
Self-image/self-worth	33%
- negative self-image	
- doubt self-worth	
- poor self-confidence	
- insecure about academic ability	
Guilt	20%
- not working	
- leaving children	
- opposing husband's attitude	
- moving away from home to attend school	

TABLE 2. continued

Barriers	Institutions All
Age - too old for school - too old to think or change	10%

Note: List of barriers not inclusive.

and 133 responses from the 14 subjects at Institution D. There were 413 responses and the range of average responses per person was 8-11.

Major Barriers

Major barriers, those formidable enough to have kept them out of college or university, were identified by the subjects in Part 3 of the interviews. They were categorized as psychological, social, or institutional barriers. More social barriers than institutional or psychological barriers were identified and they are shown separately.

Table 3. Major barriers identified by the participants are shown by percentage distribution within categories, for each institution, and for the institutions as a whole.

TABLE 3. Percent of Major Barriers by Category and institution (N = 83 responses, 42 subjects)

Major Barriers	Institution A	B	C	D	All
Social	55	77	56	72	65
Psychological	30	7	20	12	17
Institutional	15	15	24	16	18

Table 4. An analysis of Table 3. Three components of the major social barriers identified by the participants are shown by percentage distribution, for each of the institutions, and for the institutions as a whole.

TABLE 4. Percent of Major Barriers--Social Barriers
(N = 53 responses, 38 subjects)

Social Barriers	Institution				
	A	B	C	D	All
Financial	55	50	57	44	52
Family Responsibilities	28	33	36	56	38
Other	17	17	7	0	10

Recommendations

Based on the type of recommendations made by the participants during Part 4 of the interviews, it was possible to classify recommendations using the same categorical groups as those used to classify barriers. It was found that recommendations directed to alleviating or eliminating institutional barriers far exceeded recommendations of a social or psychological nature.

Table 5. Participant recommendations are shown by percentage distribution within categories for each of the institutions and the institutions as a whole.

Table 6. An analysis of Table 5. Distribution of the components of the institutional recommendations identified by the participants, shown by percentage distribution for the institutions as a whole.

TABLE 5. Percent of Recommendations by Category and Institution
(N = 62 responses; 41 subjects)

Recommendations	Institution				
	A	B	C	D	All
Institutional	79	64	83	53	70
Psychological	13	18	8	20	15
Social	8	18	8	27	15

TABLE 6. Percent of Recommendations--Institutional
(N = 43 responses; 30 subjects)

Institutional Recommendations	Institutions All
Adopt policies and procedures for non-traditional age students:	
Institutional Access	34
Recruitment	20
Develop Orientation/Seminars	20
Staff/Peer Counseling	16
Non-traditional Age Bias	8

Summary--Interviews

The barriers that 42 women had to overcome in order to enter college or university were identified and discussed during their interview sessions. Institutional barriers (43%) were identified more by the participants than were psychological barriers (29%), or social barriers (28%) (Table 1).

General Barriers

Institutional Barriers

Institutional barriers compiled from the transcripts were concentrated in the student service areas of admissions, financial aid, registration, and counseling/advising. This is not an unexpected outcome since these departments are directly or indirectly responsible for student access to their institutions. In general, institutional barriers identified by the subjects focused on institutional procedures.

Women who reviewed their decision-making and access activities prior to entering school, cited their lack of knowledge of basic university policy and procedures as formidable barriers. They did not know how to initiate contact with the schools. Twenty-three percent of the responses cited lack of recruitment or recruitment services, and 16% encountered barriers in admissions proceedings.

Poor, or no advisement and counseling were barriers for a number of women, as were certain registration procedures. One woman stated (and others concurred with differing language) that "registration was a lengthy and disorganized process for such a small reward." Negative treatment that related to their non-traditional age was reported by some women who were seeking access to school.

Social Barriers

Social barriers were concentrated in two areas, negative family attitudes and financial barriers.

Family attitudes created social barriers for a number of students. Women reported that negative attitudes of close family members created obstacles that had to be overcome before they could make the decision to return to school.

Many of the subjects discussed the problems of financing their education with very limited family incomes. At least half of the women in the study stated that they were able to enter school only because they qualified for federal and state educational loans and/or grants. Some women with higher family incomes explained that they encountered financial barriers because they were not the only family member attending college or university. In two such cases, four of the family members were students.

Psychological Barriers

Over half of the psychological barriers women reported encountering were barriers of poor self-image or personal identity related to their decision to return to school. Women said they lacked self-confidence, and were insecure about academic qualifications as a result of poor high school records, and some were concerned about future academic performance. Some women told of their surprise when they discovered that the option to enter school was open to them. Only one subject reported that she discovered this option as a direct result of information from a university. Most of the women had heard of the opportunity from friends who were in school, through media accounts of non-traditional age students, or from family members who were in school or had recently graduated.

Concerns about maintaining the responsibilities of multiple roles, mother/wife/employee and student, were social and psychological barriers mentioned by a number of women.

Major Barriers

In Part 3 of the interview subjects were asked to identify a barrier or barriers of such significance that it (or they) could have prevented the subject from entering school. Unlike the predominance of institutional barriers identified in the general discussions during Parts 1 and 2 of the interviews, women identified the major barriers they encountered as social (65%), with financial need first and family responsibilities second in order of importance. In comparison, psychological (17%) and institutional (18%) barriers were mentioned much less often (see Tables 3 and 4). According to many of the women who were interviewed in this study, social barriers were obstacles that could have ruled out school for them.

Recommendations

Forty-one subjects offered recommendations for other non-traditional age women who might wish to return to school. The responses were directly related to the need to change and/or augment institutional policy and practice, 70% of the recommendations sought to inform and encourage institutions to alleviate or eliminate barriers. A number of women suggested that the schools could advertise the availability of higher education opportunities, institutions should attempt to recruit non-traditional age students, and policies should be developed to inform

and assist non-traditional age students through the admission processes. Recommendations that addressed social issues included the need for support groups, and the need to eliminate sex-role stereotypes reflected in school policies. Recommendations to help overcome psychological barriers of poor self-image, or fear of failure were mentioned by some of the women.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS

The goal of this research was to discover barriers some non-traditional age women entering a four-year college or university as freshmen encountered as they made the decision to return to school and sought entry. Barriers were identified from the transcripts of interviews and in part, from the demographic surveys of 42 freshmen women students, age 35 or older, enrolled in four Oregon four-year post-secondary institutions, involved in this study. Conclusions based on information from the interview transcripts, and data from the surveys are presented in this chapter. Where applicable, information from the literature on non-traditional age women students is introduced for contrast with some of the conclusions drawn in this study, and to acknowledge similarities between the outcome of this and other research on non-traditional age women students.

While this study concentrates on what a small group of non-traditional age women perceive as barriers, it does not imply that non-traditional age women are alone in encountering barriers to college or university. Any person seeking access to a college or university might, for example, find that financial needs are the major barrier to higher education as did many of the women in this study. Others, traditional and non-traditional potential students alike, have discovered that ignorance of how to access the educational system can

intimidate and for some, defeat. Many potential students share fear-of-rejection, and anxiety about failing. One of the telling differences, however, for non-traditional age persons is the length of time away from school, and what that time represents in terms of commitment to others and commitment to self.

The barriers that women in this study encountered are presented here, often with direct quotations from the transcripts, as symbols of the lengthy, and for some, traumatic effort they put forth to enter school as non-traditional students. Generalizations about the barriers these women encountered must be drawn with caution. It will be seen from this study that problems formidable enough to create barriers for some women were simply annoyances for others. Some women encountered a barrier and overcame it to move on, while others facing the same barrier were forced to delay and reconsider. A debilitating circumstance for one woman could act as an incentive for another. These dichotomies were most apparent when women discussed their struggles to be admitted to school. One woman said, "So many times I wanted to quit . . . I just don't measure up . . . I really want to go to school but I'm still not sure I should even be here" while another attitude was quite different. "I decided these people were not going to win, I'm just as good as most of these young kids running around here whether this school thinks so or not. I was determined I was going to get into school this term, and I did." The perceptions among the women in this study about what constituted a barrier were highly individualistic and they involved complex personal values, difficult factors from which to generalize.

Marienau (1977) in her study of barriers to adult learner's participation in higher education found that "barriers are derived from two sources: they are derived from the situations people face and the particular value orientations of the people themselves" (p. 11). Her findings indicate that these "barriers can be eliminated from both external and internal sources and are likely to contain elements from both sources" (p. 12). She speculated that value-related barriers could be overcome through internal sources, personal adjustments of the adult learner. Marienau established that the second category of barriers she identified, "situational barriers such as access to educational facilities and finances, . . . hold the greatest promise of being overcome by external sources" (p. 13). Women in this study appear to support Marienau's generalizations, particularly in regard to institutional barriers.

Making the Decision

The time it took women to work through the decision to return to school varied. At some time during the interviews all of the women talked about their desire to return to school, for some this was a short-term desire or need to return to school. For 22 of the 42 women school had been a goal for many years. "I had always wanted to go to school," or "I never gave up the idea that I would go to school when I could."

The decision-making process for women in this study usually involved coping with or overcoming barriers that had hampered them for some time. Generally these barriers were psychological, relating to

poor self-image and lack of self-confidence where school was concerned. The initial contact with a school for information about admissions did present some women with new or additional psychological barriers. A number of the women in this study who contacted colleges or universities for information on which to base their decision to return to school were faced with negative attitudes and/or demeaning treatment. One woman stated "I had no encouragement here, this school was very cool toward me and I felt different," and another said, "the admissions office really made me feel old when I asked about entering and they found out I would be a freshman." Another, "I knew I didn't know anything about it [admissions] but they really made me feel stupid."

Social barriers interrelated with psychological and institutional barriers to create anxiety for women as they worked through the decision to enroll in school. Negative or non-supportive family attitudes, and/or limited financial resources were formidable barriers for many women as they attempted to bolster their self-confidence and overcome ignorance of the system they were determined to enter.

Seeking Entry

A lack of knowledge about how to approach the institution, and lack of information about how the system worked, created most of the barriers this group of women encountered as they sought access to college or university.

Coupled with low self-confidence or guilt or poor self-image, or other psychological barriers, a negative reaction from a school office caused many women to doubt their decisions, and a few to think about

abandoning their goals. Some of their recollections of this time are: "I tried to get into this school, but couldn't take the hassle, you don't even know the questions to ask"; "the only way I made it into this school was through help and information from my friends and the young kids who answered my questions"; "without my husband to show me the ropes, I would have given up the second time I heard 'you should have gone to a community college' from the admissions office"; and most telling, "I felt like I was outside a clear glass bubble and couldn't get in. I was hitting it and I just couldn't penetrate, I was talking through the glass like a mimic and they were looking at like 'I don't understand a thing you are saying.'"

Women in this study identified institutional barriers (43%) more often than psychological barriers (29%) or social barriers (28%) as they discussed the problems they encountered during the decision-making and admission process prior to entering school (see Table 1). Tittle and Denker (1980) found that the majority of the surveys in the literature concerning non-traditional age women students in higher education, indicated that psychological barriers were the most common and the most complex. Analyses of the barriers identified by women in this study do not appear to support that generalization.

Institutional Barriers

In studying the research on institutional practices that affect the participation of women students it was found that potential institutional barriers to the full participation of women students are most readily found in admissions; financial aid; student services; and rules,

regulations and requirements (Marienau, 1977; Gappa & Uehling, 1979; Weinstein, 1980). Analyses of the interview transcripts from this study support those findings.

The interviews revealed five areas where the 42 non-traditional age women in this study encountered institutional barriers. Institutional barriers were identified in recruitment practices, admission policies and procedures, advising and counseling, registration, and age of the student (see Table 2).

Recruitment

Lack of recruitment was a barrier for women in this study seeking access to school, 23% of the responses specifically cited lack of recruitment or alluded to it. Gappa and Uehling (1979) found that a critical factor for older women contemplating entrance into post-secondary institutions was discrimination in recruitment practices. The lack of an extensive information base and assistance with entrance requirements commonly provided through recruitment of traditional age students, constituted a major barrier to non-traditional age women.

The problem women identified in their interviews as they described their admissions experiences support Gappa and Uehling's (1979) research. "I didn't know where to go on the campus to get started once I had decided to return to school"; "I had no prior advice on how to get admitted, I had to work through it myself"; "Not knowing about the process is very difficult, you don't know what questions you should be asking"; and "I didn't understand the lingo they were speaking--hours, and transcripts, and registrar, and GPA"; "I think older students should

be recruited like my daughter was, the schools were on the phone to her all the time."

Many higher education policy makers concur with this older student's advice, especially in this time of declining enrollment, but few institutions have moved any distance toward developing procedures to recruit non-traditional age students.

Admissions Policy/Procedure

Women had to work through a number of other problems as they applied for entry, and/or financial aid, 16% of the responses concerning barriers referred to admissions or financial aid. Some representative comments were: "It just seemed as if I had to learn the process by my own mistakes, they were not helpful"; "If friends hadn't told me all about how to go through admissions and helped me when I needed it, I would have given up"; "I didn't understand the deadlines for financial aid, I had to wait a whole year"; "the admissions people are definitely geared toward the young students who know what it is all about." "I couldn't believe the way the woman in admissions treated me, like I was the most stupid thing she had met." While the admissions procedures drew a good deal of negative comment from these women, many of them readily admitted that the problems were often magnified because of their own apprehension, intimidation or insecurity. They knew what they wanted to do--enroll in school--they had little or no idea of how to accomplish this, or even where to start.

Often, student service's staff assume that older women understand the admissions process based on their own maturity. Generally, the

older woman will not shatter that illusion. She doesn't want to appear "stupid." Discovering what she doesn't know about reading her goal is a severe challenge to her self confidence. As one woman said, "I was terrified that I wouldn't know something they thought I should." An institutional commitment to older women students carries with it the need to assure that everyone responsible for institutional access understands their client's needs.

Advising/Counseling

Problems with advising and counseling drew negative comments from some women, 14% of the responses cited lack of, or poor advising and counseling as barriers. Many women (but not all) were given the name of an advisor or counselor to see, or told to find a counselor when they needed help. Women reported that "My counselor was a real space cadet, I guess the fact that I wasn't a parent but someone needing advice to get into school, threw him"; "I could never reach my advisor"; "Advising and counseling were simply non-existent, I felt abandoned"; "I couldn't pin down my advisor, I haven't seen him yet"; "Advising was pretty bad, faculty don't have time for you"; "I was told by my advisor to wait until registration, then all my questions could be answered. He simply didn't know how to deal with a thirty-nine-year-old woman who wanted to come to school"; and, "I had no counseling, nobody told me there was such a thing." This lack of assistance for women who had little or no information about admissions or registration was devastating for some. "A professor, a man, could see I was frantic and took pity on me. He

talked to me for an hour. I tried not to cry, I was so relieved to have someone pay attention to what I had to know to register."

Setting and reaching a goal requires a plan. For most of these women, making the decision to return to school and fitting that goal into personal commitments and responsibilities took a great deal of time, and, for some, was difficult and frustrating. Once the decision was made most women had no concept of what lay ahead of them to implement their decision. Some women echoed what another said. Had they known, they "probably couldn't have done it, you had to take one step at a time, and just hope that it would work out."

Registration

While registration caused real frustration for a number of students, it was not a barrier for most, 10% of the responses were concerned with registration. Two women who had problems said, "I didn't understand any of the process to register, I was lost. I cried all the way home"; and, "I was terrified of registering, I knew it was important but I couldn't find out how to do it"; "A lot of my classes were canceled by the time I figure it all out." Another view, "registration is ridiculous, it is much too complicated a process for such a simple outcome."

By the time most of these women reached the point of registering they had found that students were helpful and willing to answer questions when asked. Traditional age students often assumed a more mature looking woman was a graduate student or a member of the faculty. At

times students sought help from one of the women who "didn't know what a credit hour was, or how to figure out when a class met." Most women had to learn to ask their soon-to-be-peers for help--when they did they were able to overcome a number of barriers standing between them and acceptance as a student.

Age

Only 9% of all the institutional barrier responses were age related. It appears that some of the institutions' staff had problems coping with the needs of non-traditional age students. One woman said, "I felt at one point like I was being treated badly because the financial aid office didn't know what to do with a forty-year-old woman who had worked most of her life"; another, "at orientation for freshmen I had to keep explaining to staff who wanted me in the 'parents' line' that today I wasn't a parent, I was a student, it was demoralizing."

While the institutional barriers these women encountered were nearly all overcome by the time they were interviewed for this study, they were still very fresh in the memories of those who had experienced them. No matter how inadvertently they were raised, the barriers had to be overcome. What the system extracted from this group of women in order for them to become students, still rankled. Their frustrations as they struggled to "get in" appear to have resulted in empathy for others who want to enter school. Over 70% of the recommendations made by this group of women to assist other non-traditional age women were specifically directed to alleviating or eliminating institutional barriers (see Tables 5 and 6 or p. 52).

Many of the institutional barriers women encountered were the result of institutional policies and procedures inappropriate for non-traditional students. The policies were designed for traditional age students in a system that seldom considered an older-than-average-woman student as anything other than an oddity. Some barriers women encountered were there because potential student and staff alike, are the products of stereotypical indoctrination, a long history of socialization that continues to dictate certain roles, and lifestyles for women.

Social Barriers

Negative family attitudes and financial need were social barriers identified by many women. Over a third of the responses, 36%, related to family attitudes as barriers, 31% of the responses identified financial needs as barriers, while sex-role stereotyping, age, and childcare combined, accounted for 25% of the responses.

Family Responsibilities

As they made the decision to return to school, many of the mothers in this group said they worried about the time away from their families. Fifteen of the 36 women in this study had children under 12, and 72% had children under 17 years of age. For some mothers, single-parents for the most part, family responsibilities and childcare were burdensome and guilt provoking. "I worried a lot whether I could take care of my kids, work and go to school"; "I really questioned myself about leaving my kids to go back to school"; "My first priority is my kids, I am real

vulnerable to circumstances." "I feel real guilty when I know the kids are home from school and I am not there." Two mothers had moved away from their home towns with their high-school age children, in order to go to school. One said, "I wouldn't have uprooted my son if he had said no, I just would have waited another two years till he graduated."

Negative and non-supportive family members were barriers to school for some women. "My family is really not supportive of a woman my age going to school"; "My husband is scared and frustrated, he is sure I will leave him when I graduate"; "My mother keeps asking me what I am going to do with all this education at my age"; "My husband's threatened attitude kept me out of school the first time I decided to go back"; "When my parents heard that I was going to quit my job to go to school, they were appalled." One woman, confronted her husband's decision to return to school for his second advanced degree by saying that she wanted to go to school too. "If he hadn't felt so guilty [about his career change at 45], I wouldn't be here today. It would never have crossed his mind that I might want to go to school."

Family responsibilities and attitudes weighed heavily in the decision to return to school. For some women in this group the decision-making process spanned years. Davis (1982), in her study of young adults, older adults, and traditional age undergraduate students reported that adult students come to campuses with outside commitments, life-experience, and frequently a responsibility for the support of other individuals. Education is not simply added to other actions and responsibilities of life, it must replace something else. This

replacement must be carefully considered and weighed, requiring what is often a long period of decision making (p. 34).

Seventy-five percent of the women who reported husband/partner attitudes stated that husbands were very or somewhat supportive of their decision. Two negative descriptors of husband or partner selected by the women were "feels neglected" (27%), and "attitude is changeable" (19%). Most of the children were supportive during the decision process and after. Mothers told with delight the experience of shared assistance with homework assignments with their children.

Making the decision to return to school and achieving success in their new role while satisfactorily meeting family commitments constitutes a juggling act for many women. It is difficult to generalize about assistance to overcome barriers when so little is known about retention or success patterns for women who begin a four-year college or university education at age 35 or older.

Financial Needs

At least a fourth of the women interviewed stated that they were unaware of government grants, loans or work study opportunities for students even after their initial contact with a college or university. Others, who were given basic admission information, including procedures for application for financial-aid, reported that, initially, they had disregarded the information believing that they did not qualify for assistance because of their non-traditional age or their delayed entry to school. A chance conversation with a student, or graduate, or "someone who knew someone who was in school" brought about discovery of

the availability of financial-aid for some, others who understood the financial aid information in the college catalog contacted the school's financial-aid office with varying degrees of success. One woman said, "I couldn't believe I was eligible for aid, it meant I could go to school instead of just dream about going." Another woman was told, "you make too much money, we can't OK any of this for you." For two women, bank loan officers offered the explanation that government support was available through student grants or loans and they probably qualified. A few women in this group said they had to delay applying to enter school because of problems with the financial-aid application procedures. Some struggled with application forms couched in educational terms they did not understand. Afraid to show their ignorance, they sought help elsewhere. Others found they faced a waiting period of nearly six months to assure they would have enough money for school and living expenses, assurance they had to have before they could make the commitment to begin school.

In a few cases lack of money had delayed entry for some of the women in this study from 1-6 years. Thwarted earlier by what were insurmountable financial barriers, a few of these women had decided to postpone their decision, or to drop plans to enter school. A few women reported that they generated funds to meet school expenses by refinancing or selling their homes, borrowing on insurance, or borrowing money from close family members. Others discussed the responsibilities they faced trying to decide whether they should borrow money to attend school. One woman said she and her husband delayed a decision about her schooling because they were concerned about the educational loans

necessary to see her through school. "We are very worried about how we are going to pay them back. It makes me very nervous."

Some women who worked outside the home faced financial barriers of another sort. Many found they had to leave their jobs in order to attend school. Four women who could not quit their jobs, continued to work and attend school on a full-time basis. Most of them attended classes at night. Loss of the woman's income caused problems in some families. Children were very unhappy, and in one case, hostile, about a decrease in the family income which would affect the lifestyle of the family. One mother, a single parent, knew the loss of her paycheck would create problems in meeting basic family needs. She told her high-school age son she expected him to use part of his paycheck to help out with living expenses. He balked, saying she should not quit a good paying job "just go to to school." "I told him the end justified the means, I am going to get a much better job with a good salary after I get my degree."

Three single-parents who had been living on government assistance had to make the decision to give up most of their government aid-to-dependent-children in order to attend school. One of the three explained, "the state will not pay for you to attend a four-year school, only a Voc. Tech. program. I do get money for the children, but it means we live on very little in order for me to get a teaching degree."

Two women who reported family incomes of $35,000 or above said that their children did not want to give up the comfortable lifestyles the mother's paycheck represented. One woman said her daughter was worried about what the loss of income would mean to her, she wanted her mother

to "wait a few more years." Another said her children were uncooperative after the first family discussion about her plans to enter school. They felt she was "selfish not to keep her job until after they had finished college."

What constituted a financial barrier to college or university was relative to personal circumstances. One woman said, "I have always been poor, this time is not any different for me." What women (and their families) were willing to do without in order that the women could begin their education varied widely. There is no question of the effects severe cuts in educational grants and loans proposed by the Reagan Administration will have on the majority of women in this group. Their responsibility to support or contribute to the support of family and self will probably dictate that they leave school.

Sex-Role Stereotypes

Social sex-role stereotyping was a causal factor for at least 10 women in their delay in entering college. Comments such as "I had wanted to go on to school ever since I graduated from high school, I was a good student too, but there was only enough money for the boys in my family to go to college," or "there was never any question in my family that after high school I was to get married and start a family, that's what women did in the small town I come from." These family attitudes were still creating barriers for at least four women. Parents who had not supported higher education for their daughters when the women left high school, questioned their decision to enter now. One parent actively campaigned with her daughter's family to "keep her at home

where she belonged." Depending on the strength of the parent/daughter relationship, some women had to overcome longstanding barriers of negative attitudes toward women's place in higher education.

During the past 15-20 years changes in societal perceptions of women's role have brought about legal removal of some of the social barriers confronting older women who attempt to enter school. Stereotypes, and the barriers they raise are not overcome by passing laws. Women who finally eliminated the stereotypical barrier of "school for men, home for women" entered school with the barrier behind them. Women who had to combat strong family resistance to their decision to enter school continue to confront the barrier, and it may yet overcome their goal of a college education.

Age

Age contributed to the concerns women had during their decision-making and their efforts to enter college or university. "I had real questions about whether the school would take me because of my age, if they would think I was just fooling around." "This is the only school I could have come to, the mental image in the others is that school is for the young" said one woman. Another reiterated what others had said, "I knew I was 40 [or 35 or 42 or 50] years old, if I don't do it now I am going to be too old," as if learning ability or interest declined rapidly after the traditional age for schooling. Three women shared the same kind of experience with varying reactions. "It got embarrassing to tell people I was going to go to school, most of them thought I was going to get a graduate degree, not start all over at my age." One

woman said what others had said, or alluded to in their interviews, "I couldn't believe they would let anyone my age go to school."

Age was a barrier for a few women and the barrier resulted from their own limiting attitudes about non-traditional age women and school. Socialization of women in this age group had not included the opinion of returning to school at age 35 or older. If the option had presented itself, it was a continuing education concept widely held in higher education. That is older women interested in returning to school should take a few courses now-and-then, nothing as radical as entering college as a freshman at the advanced age of 35 or above.

Psychological Barriers

Over two-thirds of the psychological barriers identified by the women in this study were related to concepts of their personal identity. Feelings of negative self-worth, lack of self-confidence and poor self-image played important roles in hindrance of women as they sought to make the decision to return to school, and moved through the process required to enter school. Feelings of guilt and concerns about their age accounted for nearly one-third of the psychological barriers this group of women encountered.

Personal Identity

Many women questioned their intelligence and capabilities, their ability to study after all the years away from school. "I was very apprehensive about going back to school, could I think after all the years of being a secretary?" Another woman insisted that "I must do

well, my family and husband expect it of me." Others talked about negative experiences and memories of school. "I was afraid of not being able to succeed because of that old fear of tests." Another, "I was afraid that I could not get beyond the terrible memories I had of my first experience in college, right out of high school." Three women in the study were concerned about their motivation of being in school. One commented, "I am not sure I am motivated enough to go to school, I hated school as a younger student, I am here because my husband thought I should come, thought it would help me decide what I wanted to do with my life," and another said, "my focuses have not been very realistic, I am not sure school is what I need right now."

Most of the psychological barriers women encountered in their decision and access processes will be overcome as a result of their school experiences. The barriers they managed to cope with in order to enter school will be resolved as they continue through to graduation.

Guilt

Feelings of guilt among the women appeared to center on family matters and finances. During the interview sessions women discussed openly the guilts they, for the most part, still carry with them. Comments such as "I had done everything for my family and when I went to school I knew I couldn't, it made me feel guilty"; "I felt a lot of guilt about putting my kids through all this"; I felt guilty about school affecting our home life"; and "I worry about the quality of childcare for my kids" were some of the barriers identified by women. Unlike most of the institutional barriers women encountered, these

psychological barriers were more difficult to overcome as they entered school.

Women expressed guilt about needing to quit their jobs in order to go to school. "I knew I wasn't going to be bringing my share [of money] into the house," or "I worried about depriving my kids of things they were used to when I quit work." One woman felt guilty about asking for financial-aid, and another expressed the guilt she carried around for years. She said, "I still feel guilty about dropping out of school 20 years ago."

Women in this group concur with Ryan's (1979) findings. "Guilt is one of the most insidious problems encountered by nature women and it has put an end to many a college career almost before it got started" (p. 26). Combating the barriers guilt creates is a lifelong undertaking for many of us. Women in this study reported comparatively few barriers concerning guilt.

Age

A few women spoke about their age. "I will be 35 when I start, will I be able to remember like the younger kids?" and another, "everyone here seemed so young in comparison to me." One woman said, "I felt old." More than one woman shared the fear, "I was afraid that at my age I was too old to think, too old to change after so many years out of school."

Negative or worrisome feelings about their non-traditional age in respect to returning to school were common among this group of women, however they were barriers for only a few. Fearing and delaying school

because of feeling "old" or "different from everyone else" affected three women in this study enough to hinder their decision-making. Their barriers were easier to overcome once they were on campus, especially three of the four campuses where older students were relatively easy to find.

The 42 subjects of this study found as they moved through decision-making and admissions procedures that they were often faced with the need to set educational priorities which were in conflict with personal values, family responsibilities, or financial resources. The recommendations that 41 of these women gave for others contemplating similar educational goals reflect these personal conflicts and the barriers they had to overcome to enter school.

Major Barriers

During the interviews each woman was asked to identify one or more major barriers from those she had encountered while she made her decision to return to school and sought admission to a college or university. The definition of major barrier in this context meant a barrier so formidable that it, or they, could have kept the woman from entering school. Each of the 42 women in this group of non-traditional age students reported encountering a major barrier or barriers.

Responses to the direct question of major barriers in Part 3 of the interviews resulted in an emphasis on social barriers rather than the emphasis on institutional barriers identified during the discussions in Parts 1 and 2. The major barriers women cited later in the interviews

were drawn from among the general barriers they had identified earlier, during the discussions about decisions and access.

It appears that in identifying one or more major barrier the individual was required to give weight to one barrier over another, to specify which barrier was most formidable in respect to achieving her goal of entering college or university. It was quite clear, however, that what one woman perceived as a major barrier might not be considered a major barrier, or for that matter a barrier at all, for another woman. There was some agreement however in that over one-third of all the responses cited financial need or concerns as major barriers to school.

The difference in perception of the women in this study over what constituted a major barrier can be seen in these comments drawn from the interview transcripts. One woman who said, "I wanted to go to school for years" stated that "my own self-image kept me out, I didn't believe that we older ones had the right to go to school." Another woman's self-image as she discussed her long-term desire to return to school was quite different. "I could picture myself in school and I used to be tickled. Here I am sitting in a classroom, isn't that neat! I did not view myself as being too old, mainly because I am not in competition with anyone, just myself, I just felt smug thinking about it."

A barrier seen as major by one woman was seen as a positive educational option by another. "If they had made me go to a community college before they would accept me, I would not have done it, school might have had to wait, I had a real mind-set, I had dreamed about going to this university and I was going or else!" Another woman, in her recommendations for others said, "If you are scared or they won't let

you in, go to a community college first, I did and it really helps you with the fears."

Women with limited incomes faced formidable financial barriers to school. Over half of the women in the study identified financial need as a major barrier. Conversely one woman reporting a family income of $35,000 or more, identified the lack of government financial aid one of her major barriers. She expressed bitterness at having to use "family money" for her education when others "could borrow money at a low interest rate while I am losing interest by being forced to use our family savings for my education because the government thinks we are too wealthy to have to borrow money for school. I pay taxes too, it is unfair."

Social Barriers

Social barriers were those most often referred to in response to the request for identification of major barriers. On the average, social barriers accounted for 65% of all major barriers, while institutional and psychological barriers each accounted for 17% of the total major barriers (see Table 3). Financial needs and concerns (52%) and family responsibilities (38%) made up the bulk of major social barriers.

Financial Needs and Concerns

A major social barrier identified by 28 of 42 (67%) women was the need for financial assistance. Most of the women cited lack of financial resources to meet the cost of attending school, and to support, or assist with the support of themselves and/or a family during the time

they were attending school. Many of the women who identified lack of money as the, or one of the major barriers they encountered also declared that they could not afford their college education without the assistance of state and federal financial-aid programs. It is to be expected that the financial barrier to a college or university education for 23 of the women in the study who have family incomes under $15,000, could be an awesome deterrent. All of them, 60% of the subjects in this study, identified the need for financial assistance as a major barrier.

It should be noted however that financial barriers were major deterrent to school for some reporting family incomes of $35,000 and above. "We have three kids in college and the cost of all this education is killing us" reported one woman. Medical expenses for family members created major financial problems for two women who did not qualify for state or federal educational financial-aid.

Family Responsibilities

Other major social barriers cited by the women in this study were barriers resulting from family responsibilities and/or adverse family attitudes toward the subjects' return to school.

Mothers returning to school encountered barriers and for some, they were barriers that kept them out of school. Five of the freshmen women in this study had previously dropped out of school because adequate childcare was not available, because of the terminal illness of a child, or as the result of pressure from family "to stay home and take care of my kids." They had returned, coping with the barriers in one way or

another, however, other women in the group cited childcare and family attitudes as major barriers for them.

Some women reported that negative family attitudes eroded their determination to enter school. One woman reported that her husband's attitude was her major barrier. While the decision to return to school was hers, the decision had qualifications tied to it. She could go to school but only with the understanding that there were to be no changes in the lifestyle of the family unit as a result of the new role. " . . . [G]o to school if it makes you happy but I don't want you in any stressful situations, we have a nice comfortable relationship and I don't want that disrupted." Another woman said she had to negotiate to get out of the house. "He had to agree to help with the kids and let me borrow money, they have to sign you know or you can't get it. He agreed to let me go to school if I could work it out about the kids." Another woman said "any circumstance involving my kids could have stopped me."

A factor in the predominance of social barriers cited as major could be related to the timing of the interviews. The subjects of this study were interviewed well into the first school term (or second or third for some women) of their freshman year. They had overcome to some degree both institutional and psychological barriers they had encountered seeking entry. What remained were social barriers, finances and family responsibilities. The mix of major barriers could have been somewhat different had the interviews taken place during the first week of school.

Institutional Barriers

Major institutional barriers identified by women were nearly all admissions related. "The frustrations, the lack of helpfulness and information about admissions was a major barrier for me"; "I couldn't understand the language, they used words I didn't have a clue to the meaning of"; "People would look at me like I wasn't very bright because I would ask questions about what I was supposed to be doing"; "Getting through admissions without my friends' help--I would have been in a bad way." Lack of knowledge of policy and procedures, poor communication, and poor treatment by staff accounted for nearly all of the responses. In all probability, had these women been recruited, given as traditional age students are, the information, orientation, and pre-registration assistance most traditional age students have come to expect from colleges and universities, only two of the major institutional barriers identified would have been of any consequence to the women. Academic eligibility was a major barrier for two women as they sought admittance.

Psychological Barriers

Women who indicated that psychological barriers were major deterrents cited poor self-image, lack of self-confidence, fear of rejection because of some institutional rule or regulation, and apprehension about academic ability. "I didn't know if I had the intelligence to do it"; "I question myself, can I really do this, do I have the energy to work and go to school?" "Changing careers at 42, starting in a whole new field can be frightening." One woman said, "I don't really know what I

want, my life is in a state of constant flux." And finally, "Something about being around all these young kids is that they make you feel like they belong here and you don't."

Despite the fears and the doubts, the anxiety and frustrations, the subjects of this study were able to overcome to some degree, the barriers they encountered, and they entered school. The outstanding personal characteristic that nearly every one of these women shared was determination, the will to go into school. Throughout the interviews women revealed this determination as they described their experiences, fighting a system that seemed at times, designed to keep them out.

Recommendations

The second purpose of this research of the barriers encountered by non-traditional age freshman women is to provide recommendations that will assist in eliminating or alleviating barriers for other women contemplating entering a college or university. The participants in this study were asked during their interviews to make recommendations that would assist other non-traditional age women who wished to enter school.

Recommendations made by the participants were classified as institutional, social or psychological in order to identify the specific issues women addressed, and to find common patterns among the recommendations if they existed (see Tables 5 and 6). The majority of the recommendations (70%) made by 41 of the participants in this study were directed to overcoming institutional barriers.

One of the recommendations made by a participant was based on her personal experience with the system. A professor's wife (one of the women in this study) said "there could be a more structured attitude on the part of professors and advisors, and the programs which assist women in finding what their weaknesses are. Particularly when attitudes were different in the past with math and girls for instance, helping to work that out. Educated people can be intimidating for those who are not formally educated with the language, degrees, and so forth." A woman who had delayed school because of her poor self-image recommended, "If the university or college scares you go to a community college first. Try not to show fear, speak with a counselor whenever you need help. Be very honest with yourself. Kids have a lot to offer you, and you have a lot to offer them." Both of these women addressed institutional, social, and psychological issues in their recommendations for older potential students.

Three women, each at a different college or university, who had struggled with institutional admissions procedures were specific in their recommendations. "Just keep being persistent, keep trying until you have exhausted every avenue," and another, "persevere, don't let them get you down, make up your mind that they won't defeat you," and the third, "don't take no for an answer, some people just don't want to be bothered to find out. Don't give up!"

There were comparatively few recommendations directed to social or psychological barriers. One woman, speaking of family responsibilities, said "allow yourself not to worry about other outside responsibilities when you are in school." Another woman suggested "make sure you have

some people around you to support your efforts." One recommendation ended with the comment ". . . barriers have made me stronger, they are not all bad." One woman echoed what other participants had commented on during their interviews, "don't worry that your mental abilities have deteriorated."

Women spoke to alleviating and eliminating the barriers they had encountered in their recommendations for others. The recommendations were practical, eliminating or alleviating most of the barriers the women addressed is possible.

Institutional recommendations were classified in four areas: institutional access, support groups/counseling, recruitment, and orientation. Recommendations for institutional access (36% of the institutional recommendations) cited of the need to understand the procedures for admissions, financial aid, registration, and other entrance requirements.

Recommendations specifying the need for recruitment, orientation, and materials about the institution written for non-traditional age students were made by a few, and one woman felt the school she was attending was remiss in its public relations. "Advertise, people don't know there may be something here for them. Disseminate at a more personal level, tell what you have to offer, what you can do for them." And more specific, "this school needs to hire people who are aware that older students just don't come out of the woodwork." One woman said, "the university should look at its policies and try to suit them to the experience and background of the person coming through." Another commented, "shorten and improve registration. Try and improve the

knowledge and efficiency of people who work behind the windows." The recommendations that were made directly related to institutional, social and psychological barriers these women had observed or encountered during the time they sought to enter school.

A freshmen transfer student who had moved from one state university to another after her second term, made an interesting recommendation. "I feel people would be better off at [name of university]. There are a larger percentage of older students there and the classes reflect the flavor, the professors reflect the flavor, you can feel it, something comes with age."

Most of the recommendations made by the women in this study are realistic, the suggestions they made can be implemented. By developing admissions procedures and policies for non-traditional age students, universities and colleges can remove most of the institutional barriers addressed in the recommendations.

Institutional commitment to recruiting non-traditional age women requires more than adapting existing admissions policy and practice. Older women seeking entrance to school are non-traditional, many colleges and universities have not taken their unique characteristics or needs into account, and as a result institutional barriers continue to block their access to higher education.

The outline of a plan for institutions to consider in recruitment of non-traditional age women is presented in Appendix E.

Summary

This is a study of 42 freshmen women age 35 or above enrolled in Oregon four-year institutions of higher education. The study was undertaken to discover what barriers non-traditional age women encountered as they made the decision to return to school as freshmen students and sought entry. A second purpose of this study was to provide recommendations for other non-traditional age women contemplating returning to school.

A review of the literature of barriers women encounter returning to school at age 35 or older indicated that there was little information available about this group before 1972. National census and higher education statistical records were not collected for non-traditional students before 1972, and later, until 1978, they were simply reported as a group of persons "over 34."

Studies of non-traditional age students are sparse before the mid-1970s and much of the literature concerning non-traditional age students in the mid-70s and early 1980s centered on continuing education and continuing education programs for women. The perception of older women as continuing education students is a stereotype that has, and continues to be a hindrance to older women seeking to enter four-year institutions as full-time students. Astin's (1976) study provided a picture of non-traditional age women students in continuing education programs. The women were average age 37, with college experience and, for many, a bachelor's degree. Many attended school part-time, were married with 2 or 3 children, living within commuting distance of

college or university, with husbands who were professionals with an above-average income. Other studies of non-traditional age women students supported that stereotype of women who returned to school.

Interest in this study of barriers to higher education resulted from (a) the number of potential older students, age 35-54. This group is the largest segment of the population in the United States today, with a projected increase in size from 45 million in 1960 to 80 million in the year 2000. The population of women in this age group is rising sharply over that of men, with a projected gain of 4 million by 1991. These data, and the increasing number of older women entering colleges and universities beginning in the late 1960s, were the reason for singling out women for this study. (b) The national interest among colleges and universities in the increasing number of non-traditional age women. These interests are related to the need to provide institutional services for these students, and recruiting non-traditional age students to compensate for the declining enrollment of traditional age students. This demographic information concerning age and population was a factor in the selection of this age group for research.

Selection of freshmen women as subjects of study relates to (a) their proximity to decision-making and access (freshmen women were more likely to have recently begun their educational experience), and (2) recall of the events and the barriers they encountered (easier for those not far removed from the experience). Current information would also reflect on the applicability of recommendations made by this group of women for others coming later.

Schools were selected on the basis of (a) similarity in their student access policies and procedures, and (b) different size, degree focus, and educational mission. One state college and 3 state universities were selected for the study.

Subjects were identified through the registrar's office at each school, and information necessary to contact the potential subject was obtained under the human subjects research policy at each institution. Sixty-two women met the criteria of age and freshmen status; 42 women (67% of the identified group) volunteered for the study.

Each of the women filled out a demographic survey and was interviewed on her home campus. With the subject's permission the interviews were recorded. The analysis of the data from the questionnaire was in four areas: personal background, education of self and family, family attitudes, and work history. Data were analyzed for each institution, and for the institutions as a whole.

The interview consisted of four sections: decision-making, institutional access, identification of major barriers, and recommendations for others. Analysis of the data included transcribing the interview from the audio-tapes and listing and categorizing the barriers each woman identified during her interviews. Information from each subject's demographic survey was incorporated into her interview transcript. Data were then analyzed for each institution, and for the institutions as a whole.

Barriers were defined as a boundary or limit, something that restricts or prevents free interchange or movement, and were categorized as institutional, social, or psychological.

The majority of the women who volunteered for this study had at least three characteristics in common: some segment(s) of society viewed them and their educational goal as non-traditional, primarily in relationship to their age, and secondarily in relationship to their age and gender; they were very determined to enter a four-year college or university; and they were seeking to earn an undergraduate degree along with their traditional age peers.

The barriers these women encountered as they made the decision to return to school and sought access were: institutional barriers (43%), psychological (29%) or social barriers (28%).

Institutional practices that were designed to provide inducement to enter, orientation and student services, and educational opportunity for traditional age students were lacking, to some degree, and in some part, for all the subjects in this study. Few of the women encountered inducements such as recruitment or pre-enrollment orientation. None of the women in this study were recruited by the institutions they were attending.

Services were available, but for many of these women, unobtainable. If they were not aware of financial aid for education, did not understand what a registrar was, did not know how to interpret what the school catalog said, or what questions to ask of whom, those services did not exist for them. All of the women would agree that educational opportunity was there for them, but it took a great deal of struggling for most of them to reach that stage in their return to school. The lack of knowledge about how to access a complicated system was costly for many of the women in this study. It created frustration, increased

their lack of self-confidence, and caused serious doubt for some about their decision to return to school.

Negative family attitudes and financial need were social barriers identified by many women. Over a third of the responses identifying social barriers, related to negative family attitudes about the women's decision to return to school. One-third of the participants faced barriers resulting from financial need. One-quarter of the social barriers they identified related to childcare, age, and sex-role stereotyping.

Negative concepts of personal identity raised two-thirds of the psychological barriers women encountered; feelings of guilt, and concerns about their age created the rest. Feelings of guilt were family related, and brought about because of the need for time away from family and home responsibilities.

During the interviews women were asked to name one (or more) major barrier, a barrier so formidable it would have kept them from entering school. Women identified social barriers (65%) over institutional (17%) or psychological (17%) barriers.

Financial need was the social barrier identified by 67% of the women who identified major social barriers. This emphasis is understandable when over 60% of the subjects in this study had family incomes of $15,000 or less, and 42% of this group reporting incomes of $10,000 or less. Family responsibilities and/or adverse family attitudes accounted for some of the major social barriers. The major institutional barriers identified by the women were admissions related, while

the major psychological barriers were related to self-concept, and their perceived academic ability.

Women made a distinction between emphasis on institutional barriers in their discussions of decision and access, and emphasis on social barriers when asked to specify major barriers--possibly because they had overcome or circumvented the institutional barriers, while the social barriers continued to hinder progress toward their goal.

Recommendations made by the women in this study centered on overcoming institutional barriers blocking the way to colleges and universities for non-traditional age women. Women made recommendations that, if implemented, could effect change. Most of the social barriers still faced by the women in this study could not easily be overcome.

APPENDIX A

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE

Date _____

CONSENT AGREEMENT TO PARTICIPATE

Before you formally agree to participate in this study, it is important that you be made aware of the following information. Please read the information below. If you are then willing to participate, sign the form at the bottom of the page and return it to the researcher.

(1) The purpose of this study is to find out more about the barriers non-traditional age women encounter as they work through the decision to enter school and complete the admission process. Making this information available to institutions of higher education can enable college and university administrators to better meet student needs.

(2) There are no risks involved to participate in this study. As a volunteer, you may decline to participate at any point in the study.

(3) You will be asked to complete a comprehensive questionnaire before your interview. Your participation should take approximately one hour. Total anonymity is assured in both the collection and recording of information. Questionnaires and interviews will be identified by number only and all data that could identify you as a participant will be destroyed when no longer needed for the purposes of this study.

(4) If you wish to receive a synopsis of the findings of this study, complete the form provided and return it to the researcher. A copy of the findings will be mailed to you at the completion of this research.

(5) If you have any questions now or at any time during the completion of the questionnaire, please ask the researcher.

_____
Wanda C. Moore - Researcher

The study described above has been explained to me and I voluntarily consent to participate.

_____
Participant

APPENDIX B

REQUEST TO PARTICIPATE

UNIVERSITY OF OREGON

I am conducting a study on the barriers non-traditional age women, age thirty-five or older, face entering college and university undergraduate programs. My interest in this topic stems from my own experiences as a non-traditional age student. I believe identifying the barriers will assist potential students to make the decision to enter an undergraduate program, and will assist colleges and universities in recruiting non-traditional age students. The study will involve women students at Portland State University, Western Oregon State College, and the University of Oregon.

This letter is a request for your participation in my study. Your help will involve about an hour of your time to meet with me for a personal interview, and to complete a short questionnaire. Your responses will be kept in strict confidence. Information gathered for this study will be used in a way that insures anonymity of the participant yet provides information to generate greater support services for potential women students. The Office of Admissions at each school has agreed to send my letters of request for your participation. Until you reply, I will not know your name or address. This was done to maintain student confidentiality.

I sincerely hope you will agree to participate. I believe there are many women our age who would like to continue their education, but for some reason have not made the attempt. Your experience will be valuable in providing information that will be used to encourage women to enter college and university programs.

Please return the attached form in the self-addressed envelope provided. I will contact you for an appointment.

If you have any questions, please contact me at school (686-5077), or at home (Monmouth - 838-6608) after five o'clock. I am looking forward to meeting you.

Sincerely,

Wanda Moore, Doctoral Candidate
Educational Policy and Management
University of Oregon

WM:rah

Graduate Studies and Administrator Certification • (503) 686-5171
Information and Field Services • (503) 686-3409
Center for Educational Policy and Management • (503) 686-5173
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APPENDIX C

PERSONAL BACKGROUND QUESTIONNAIRE

Personal Background Questionnaire

The following information about you and your background is important for the purpose of this research project. Remember that your answers will remain strictly confidential and will be anonymous.

INSTRUCTIONS:

For each item, draw a circle around the number that best describes you. Please answer every item.

Example: Color of Eyes:

1. blue
2. brown
3. green
4. grey
5. other

* *

I. PERSONAL BACKGROND INFORMATION:

(1) Age:
(write in)

(2) Motherhood Status:

1. no children (skip question #3)
2. youngest child under age 6
3. youngest child under age 12
4. youngest child under age 18
5. youngest child over age 18

(3) Number of Children:

1. one
2. two
3. three
4. four
5. five
6. more than five (how many? ____)

(4) Racial or Ethnic Background:

1. Black
2. White
3. Asian
4. Hispanic
5. Other (write in_____)

(5) Marital Status:

A. If you are currently living with a marital or sexual partner, answer here:

1. I am married to my first husband
2. I am married to my second (or subsequent) husband
3. I have never been married, am living with a male partner
4. I have been previously married, am living with a male partner
5. I am living with a female partner

B. If you are not currently living with a marital or sexual partner, answer here:

6. I have never been married
7. I am married but separated
8. I am divorced
9. I am widowed

(6) How would your describe the neighborhood area where you live?

1. urban, large city
2. within large city, but in outlying part
3. small city
4. suburban
5. small town
6. rural

(7) Annual income of your household:

1. $ 5,001-$10,000
2. $10,001-$15,000
3. $15,001-$20,000
4. $20,001-$25,000
5. $25,001-$30,000
6. $30,001-$35,000
7. More than $35,000

(8) What is the main source of income for your own upkeep and expenses?

1. myself
2. husband
3. ex-husband
4. other relatives
5. friend
6. pension, insurance, savings, investments, etc.
7. government aid
8. other (write in _____)

(9) What is the occupational level of the main provider of income for your household? (relative, ex-husband, yourself, etc.)

1. unskilled blue-collar
2. semi-skilled blue-collar
3. skilled blue collar, foreman, etc.
4. clerical, retail sales, office worker, agent, etc.
5. small business manager, department head, industrial sales, etc.
6. professional, executive of large business, etc.
7. doesn't apply to me

II. EDUCATION INFORMATION

(10) What is the highest level of education completed by your husband, ex-husband, or partner?

1. less than 12th grade
2. high school or Graduate Equivalency Diploma
3. high school plus special training
4. high school plus some college
5. associate degree from college
6. bachelor's degree from college
7. bachelor's degree plus some advanced college work
8. graduate or professional degree
9. doesn't apply to me

(11) What formal education did your parents have?

	Mother	Father
less than 12th grade	1	1
high school or Graduate Equivalency Diploma	2	2
high school plus special training	3	3
high school plus some college	4	4
associate degree from college	5	5
bachelor's degree from college	6	6
bachelor's degree plus some advanced college work	7	7
graduate or professional degree	8	8

(12) What is the highest educational level you had completed before you entered this educational institution?

1. General Equivalency Diploma (G.E.D.)
2. graduated from high school
3. high school plus business or training course
4. one year or less of college-level study
5. two years or less of college-level study
6. three years of less of college-level study
7. more than three years of college-level study

(13) What curriculum did you take in high school?

1. academic
2. commercial or business
3. vocational
4. general
5. other (write in _____)

(14) What was your approximate grade-average in high school?

1. A or B plus
2. B or B minus
3. C or C minus
4. D or lower

(15) What was the main reason you didn't enter or finish a college program soon after high school?

1. lack of money
2. marriage
3. good job opportunity
4. lack of encouragement from home
5. lack of encouragement from school
6. lack of information about opportunities and procedures
7. lack of academic preparation to meet entrance requirements
8. lack of personal desire at the time
9. other (write in _____)

(16) Of the list in #15, what was the second most important reason you didn't enter or finish a college program soon after high school?

_____ (Please write in a number from the list above or write in other reason _____)

(17) How long have you been enrolled at this educational institution?

1. less than one year
2. between one and two years
3. between two and three years
4. four or more years

(18) How long since you attended college before entering this educational institution?

1. less than one year
2. between one and two years
3. between two and three years
4. between four and ten years
5. between eleven and fifteen years
6. between sixteen and twenty years
7. over twenty-one years
8. did not attend

(19) How are you registered for classes at this educational institution?

1. part-time day student (fewer than 12 credit hours)
2. full-time day student (12 or more credit hours)
3. part-time evening student
4. full-time evening student
5. other (write in _____)

(20) What was your major reason for choosing this institution? (there may be more than one major reason.)

1. location
2. cost
3. academic reputation
4. reputation of academic major
5. recommended by a friend
6. recommended by family
7. cultural environment
8. social life
9. other (specify _____)

(21) What is your major field of study?

1. humanities (language, literature, history, philosophy, etc.)
2. physical sciences, mathematics
3. social sciences
4. health
5. business
6. the arts or communications
7. social welfare, justice
8. other (write in _____)

(22) What are your degree plans?

1. Bachelor's
2. Master's
3. Docorate (Ph.D., Ed.D)
4. Professional (M.D., D.D.S., L.L.B., J.D.)

(23) What are your career plans?

_____

_____

_____

_____

III. FAMILY ATTITUDES

(24) How would you describe the general attitude of your husband or partner toward your continuing your education?

1. strongly approving or encouraging
2. somewhat approving or encouraging
3. mixed feelings, inconsistent, changes from approval to disapproval
4. indifferent, uninterested, doesn't care
5. somewhat disapproving or discouraging
6. strongly disapproving or discouraging
7. doesn't apply to me

(25) Check any of the words or phrases below which describe the attitude of your husband or partner toward your continuing your education.

_____ understanding of my needs and desires
_____ helpful in practical matters
_____ interested or helpful in my studies
_____ emotionally supportive
_____ proud
_____ willing to make sacrifices for me
_____ approves of the goal but not the process
_____ considers it unnecessary, wasteful
_____ suspicious, apprehensive
_____ jealous, wants to keep me to himself
_____ envious of my opportunity
_____ feels threatened, insecure
_____ lacks understanding of my needs or desires
_____ merely tolerant
_____ confused, puzzled
_____ not sure, changeable
_____ resentful
_____ interfering
_____ feels neglected
_____ doesn't understand it
_____ misunderstands
_____ ridicules my efforts
_____ other (please write in)

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

_____ doesn't apply to me

(26) How would you describe the general attitude of your children or other close family members to your continuing your education?

1. strongly approving or encouraging
2. somewhat approving or encouraging
3. mixed feelings, inconsistent, changes from approval to disapproval
4. indifferent, uninterested, doesn't care
5. somewhat disapproving or discouraging
6. strongly disapproving or discouraging

IV. WORK HISTORY

(27) Which of the following best describes you? Mark only one.

1. never worked outside the home
2. worked outside the home before marriage but not after marriage
3. worked outside the home before marriage and part-time after marriage
4. worked outside the home before marriage and full-time after marriage
5. never married, worked outside the home most of my adult life
6. other (please specify _____)

(28) Which of the following best describes your work history? Mark only one.

1. have worked less than one year outside the home
2. have worked one to two years outside the home
3. have worked three to five years outside the home
4. have worked six to ten years outside the home
5. have worked eleven to fifteen years outside the home
6. other (please specify _____)

(29) If you have ever worked outside the home, how would you describe your occupational category? Mark only one.

1. domestic
2. clerical, secretarial, office worker
3. retail sales, sales agent
4. department head
5. business manager
6. professional
7. executive
8. unskilled laborer
9. waitress, food service worker
10. other (please specify _____)

APPENDIX D

INTERVIEW GUIDE

INTERVIEW GUIDE

The interview guide was structured to elicit discussion on the part of the subject, with free access on the part of the interviewer for sponstaneous probes. The interviewer sought to have the subject:

Part 1.

Discuss her decision making process preceeding her decision to enter school.

Possible probes: How long had she been thinking about returning to school? Any significant events that brought about the decision? Did she have any role models? Any (other) significant evènts during this time? Any guilts?

Part 2.

Discuss the entire process from the time she first contacted or was contacted by the school, to her first day as a student.

Possible probes: Was she recruited by the school? Did friends, relatives assist her in the admissions process? How helpful was school personnel? Faculty? Registration? Were there other events during this time that stand out in her memory?

Part 3.

Identify a major barrier or barriers, of such significance that the barrier or barriers could have prevented her entering school.

Possible probes: What was the resolution of the problem. Any other serious problems or barriers that presented difficult decisions? Did she have assistance or help?

Part 4.

Give recommendations that might alleviate or eliminate barriers for others contemplating returning to school.

Possible probes: Any other recommendations? Did she have ideas about implementing these recommendations?

In Parts 1 and 2 the subject discussed her experiences as she made her decision to return to school, worked through the admissions process, and was accepted as a student. Part 3 required specific responses concerning major barriers; those barriers significant enough to have jeopordized the subjects return to school. In Part 4 the subject was asked for rcommendations that might assist in alleviating or eliminating barriers for others contemplating returning to school.

APPENDIX E

PLANNING RECRUITMENT FOR NON-TRADITIONAL AGE STUDENTS

A plan for institutions to consider in recruiting non-traditional age (NTA) students is presented here. Effective recruitment and admissions procedures requires knowledge of the potential student. Acceptance of older students as non-traditional, with unique characteristics and needs that must be addressed differently by institutions, is basic in planning for their recruitment.

While the plan outlined below is based on recommendations from this study for institutional access of non-traditional age women, it is applicable to a much broader audience of non-traditional students. It can be used as the basis for evaluation of institutional policies and procedures now in use.

Institutional Access

Assess demographic characteristics of past/current institutional population of non-traditional age students.

Examine enrollment pattern for NTA students.

Collect demographic data, current enrollees, alumni
analyze retention for NTA students

Determine NTA student criteria for selection of institution-
academic program, recruitment, recommendation, media.

Establish an institutional task force of representative institutional constituencies including non-traditional age students, to develop policy which (a) acknowledges the institution's commitment to non-traditional age students, and (b) develops institutional policy for NTA students.

Survey representative administration, student services, faculty, alumni and TA student body, to determine attitudes concerning NTA students.

Survey current NTA students, alumni, and former NTA students to determine attitude concerning NTA students.

Develop policy of institutional commitment to NTA students, examine institutional practice as basis for developing commitment policy.

admissions procedures
institutional services (counseling/advising; orientation)
recruitment
academic/degree policies
support groups

Assess resources necessary to support institutional commitment
Commit resources necessary to support institutional commitment
Disseminate policies to all constituencies

Develop procedures for institutional access for NTA students

Assign specific personnel with responsibility for NTA student
Inform and train personnel directly involved in institutional access--admissions, financial aid, counseling, advising, registrar, business office, etc.

Monitor institutional access procedures

Evaluate institutional access procedures

Recruitment

Design recruitment strategies for NTA students

Include representatives of all constituencies involved--faculty, NTA students, admissions, financial aid, etc.

Determine needs, priorities, resources

Profile potential students

Assess current recruitment procedures in relationship to Institutional Commitment Policy

Determine special recruiting strategies for NTA students based on NTA student suggestions, student profiles, existing recruitment materials, institutional recruitment procedures for TA students

Develop outreach strategies to reach NTA students

Design recruitment orientation for NTA students
pre-admission's seminar, new student orientation

Monitor NTA student recruitment procedures

Evaluate NTA student recruitment procedures

Admissions Orientation

Recruit NTA students to plan orientation

Adapt institution's new student orientation for NTA students

Monitor student orientation procedures

Evaluate student orientation procedures

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